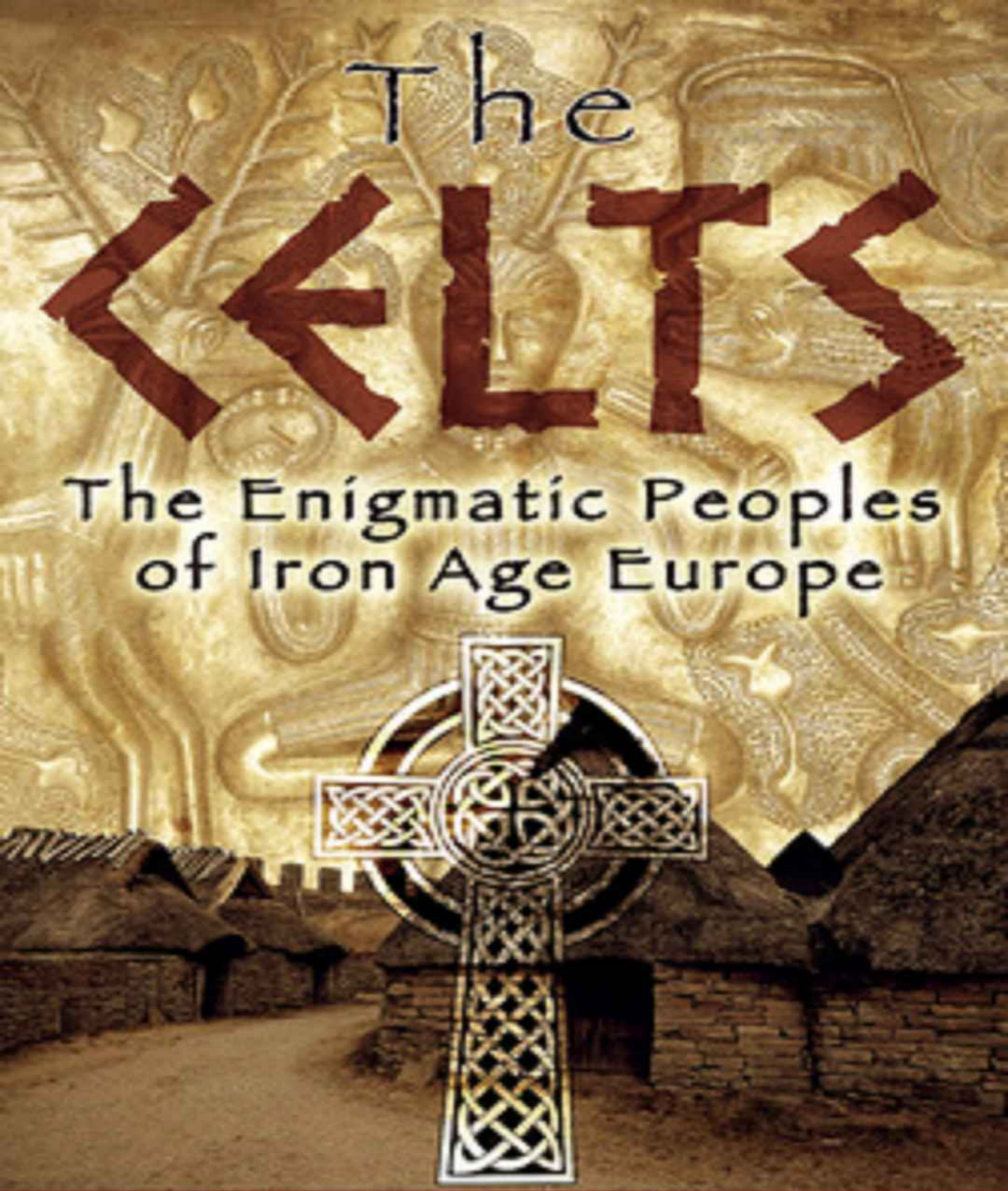
The Celts

The Enigmatic Peoples of Iron Age Europe



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Introduction

For those who have made a study of ancient history, it can seem that certain geographic areas receive much more attention than others. The Near East, for example, is by far the most studied of all ancient regions, having given rise to the greatest and oldest civilizations that defined antiquity. China, India, and the New World are also given much attention as the centers of great civilizations, many with written language systems that have allowed modern historians to piece together their histories from direct accounts in conjunction with archaeological findings. Ancient Europe, however, remains sadly under-discussed.

Contrary to popular belief in the general public that has not received specialized education in the history of the world, Europe was far from the

primitive and barbaric place that most people imagine it as being in ancient times. Though it did not reach the levels of societal complexity of the cultures of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, ancient Europe did have its own indigenous cultural traditions that were spread throughout its tribal societies. The peoples of these various tribal cultures, collectively, are known as the Celts. The Celtic peoples of ancient Europe, though tribal, developed complex cultures rich in art, religious belief and learning that have had far-reaching influences on the history of all of Europe. Once spanning from Spain to the northern reaches of modern Scotland and as far eastward as the Balkans, Celtic tribes at their territorial height encompassed almost all of what is today Europe, forming a cohesive cultural tradition that tied together distant parts of the continent.

The history of the Celts is one in which there is much uncertainty. Few direct written sources are available in the history of these remarkable peoples of ancient Europe, and the diversity of the Celtic tribes makes for an equally diverse history in different parts of Europe. Fortunately, Celtic archaeological remains have been relatively abundant, making it possible for modern historians to piece together a tentative general history of the Celts and their ways of life. From these remains and what historical

accounts have survived regarding the ancient Celtic tribes, a fascinating picture of ancient Europe and the people that inhabited it has emerged.

Though this history is certainly less complete than that of other major ancient cultures, it is nonetheless deserving of exploration. This short work will endeavor to convey to the general reader the major historical points, archaeological findings and cultural aspects of the Celtic tribes that dominated ancient Europe and gradually helped to shape it into the network of national entities that has defined modern European history. It will also attempt to establish for the reader a framework for future learning about the Celtic peoples of ancient and early medieval Europe.

Section One

The Origin, Spread and Distribution of the Celts

A lack of written history regarding Europe in ancient times, combined with the extremely diverse population groups that are known to have inhabited it at that time, makes it difficult for modern scholars to trace the lineage of the Celtic peoples accurately into antiquity. Several theories are

currently in competition to explain the origin of the Celtic peoples and the details of their extensive spread across Europe.

In order to explain these theories adequately, it is necessary to briefly describe what scholars today believe to have been the state of continental Europe prior to the spreading of the Celtic tribes. Like most places in the world, the history of Europe is divided into different ages that are identified with the predominant materials used to make tools and weapons. Here, we will largely focus on the European Bronze and Iron Ages. Unlike more unified regions of the globe, we do not see a sudden uniform break between these two periods across all of Europe. Instead, a multitude of different cultures seem to have adopted iron working across many centuries, meaning that for some time Bronze Age and Iron Age cultures coexisted in different parts of Europe.

Early in the Bronze Age of Europe, a culture existed throughout many parts of Europe that is today known as the Beaker Culture. Beaker Culture takes its modern name from a distinctive artifact called a Bell Beaker, a type of drinking vessel resembling in many ways an inverted bell. This culture seems to have flourished in Europe between the early 3rd and early to mid 2nd millennia BCE. Though this predates the spread of the Celts

across all of Europe by over 1,000 years, the Beaker Culture may be a common ancestor between the ancient Celts and other early European cultures. Over the course of the many centuries spanned by the Beaker Culture, the distinctive drinking vessels that were indicative of the presence of this culture spread through Europe and have now been found in archaeological sites ranging from Britain and Ireland to the far east of Europe. While this does not necessarily mean that every area in which these beakers have been found hosted a population that was related to every other Beaker Culture region, it does show that populations and ideas had a high degree of mobility within the context of ancient Europe.

Beaker Culture is also an important starting point because the people of this culture, enigmatic and distant as they now are, have been suggested at various times as ancient ancestors of the peoples who spoke the Celtic languages. The Celtic language group is one that is varied indeed, with some representative languages still surviving in use to this very day and many more certainly having died off in Europe's ancient and medieval periods. The modern Celtic languages can be traced back to the Iron Age, and a type of Proto-Celtic is generally attributed to the Urnfield Culture, which we will discuss shortly. However, it is possible that in remote times the peoples of the Beaker Culture formed a type of parent language

between the languages that would morph into Proto-Celtic and then eventually into full-fledged Celtic and the non-Celtic speaking peoples of Europe. This theory, tantalizing though it may be, should be considered as highly speculative, as there is insufficient information regarding the languages that would have been spoken by Beaker Culture to make such a judgment empirically.

Among the many groups that arose within the same time frame as the Beaker Culture was still in existence in some parts of Europe and that almost certainly would have had some degree of contact with it was the Unetice Culture, which arose in eastern Europe sometime during the later 3rd millennium BCE. It is with the Unetice Culture that we begin to see a rapid advancement in technologies, marking the true onset of the Bronze Age in Europe. Unlike the Beaker Culture, which was more primitive in its technologies, finds associated with the Unetice Culture often feature fine pieces of artwork and weapons that show masterful workmanship. Pottery also advanced under Unetice Culture, which employed a drinking vessel that would be instantly recognizable to almost any modern person: the mug. These early European mugs were essentially modified beakers with handles attached during the manufacturing process.

Though Unetice Culture was far removed from the Celts themselves, the cultures that succeeded it are thought to have been the direct predecessors of the Celtic cultural traditions. It should be noted, however, that even in this early phase of European history, such traditions could move fairly freely and be adopted by different populations in different places. Unetice Culture, as an example, seems to have been based almost entirely in the eastern portion of Europe, but wares made in the Unetice tradition have been found as far away as the British Isles. This degree of exchange within the groups that made up the population of ancient Europe is one of the many reasons that the tracing of history in this time period is so difficult.

The next of the chain of cultures that falls between the Beaker Culture and the development of Celtic society is known as Tumulus Culture. This culture seems to have developed as a branching off of Unetice Culture in the parts of Germany where it had been prevalent. Tumulus culture is differentiated from Unetice Culture by its typical single burial grave mounds. It is believed that both the Tumulus and Unetice Cultures were among the best-armed of the European peoples in the mid-2nd millennium BCE, probably indicating a fairly well-formed military tradition. Both cultures have been associated with bronze axes and daggers, the former often found in large caches, and Tumulus Culture has been identified as

the producer of early full-sized swords in Europe. Though these two cultures shared many similarities at first, the Tumulus culture would differentiate itself distinctly before eventually being overtaken by what is probably the earliest definitive cultural and linguistic ancestor of the Celts: Urnfield Culture.

Urnfield Culture seems to have developed independently from Tumulus Culture, with its earliest known traces today being found in southern Germany. The culture is thought to have been in existence as its own separate entity by about 1200 BCE, and would last until sometime in the early 8th century BCE. As Urnfield culture progressed, more and more advanced technologies continued to be employed. Fortified settlements, which had been associated with the Tumulus culture before it, become more common during the Urnfield period. At the same time, weapons advanced significantly, building on the existing Tumulus traditions. These developments seem to indicate a state of frequent or at least regular warfare, which some scholars have attributed to collapses in civilizations around the Mediterranean basin around the same time period and subsequent migrations that resulted from them. This theory, however, has yet to be proven by significant finds of artifacts from any of the collapsed Mediterranean cultures in Europe from that time period.

Among the military technologies that become more common in finds of this period are chariots, which had already been a common war machine in the Near East for many centuries by this time, but which had been relatively uncommon in a European context. Also developing during this period was a type of sword that was meant to be used for broad, slashing movements (as opposed to a stabbing and thrusting specialization, such as is the case with a Roman gladius sword). These swords show some degree of military continuity with later Celtic martial traditions, as we know that most Celtic soldiers fought with swords that were of similar construction and meant for use in the same manner.

Aside from the increasing advancement that is typical of Urnfield sites, the Urnfield Culture is also distinguished from other late Bronze Age cultures in Europe by its method of burial, which was one of cremation. The ashen remains would then be placed into ceramic urns and buried in specially designated fields, hence the name of the culture itself. While cremations were far from a new development by this point in human history, Urnfield Culture is unique in the context of ancient Europe for having relied on it as its primary form of burial rite.

Illustration 1: An artist's rendering of weapons typical of Hallstat Culture finds.

By the end of the time period that encompassed Urnfield Culture, it had become the predominant cultural entity throughout much of central Europe. The Urnfield period gradually ended with the development of what is today called Hallstat Culture, which seems to have arisen sometime around 800 BCE in modern Germany. Hallstat Culture is generally believed to have been the first fully-fledged culture which can truly be called Celtic, although the European cultures that preceded it certainly contained elements that would be carried on into later Celtic culture. Contemporary inscriptions in Celtic writing systems

found in conjunction with Hallstat sites demonstrate that by the time of Hallstat Culture's dominance over Europe, forms of the various Celtic languages were spreading and becoming more universal in Europe. This cultural diffusion would eventually carry Hallstat Culture, and with it the traditions, language and artistic styles that would come to be identified as Celtic, across most of continental Europe and even into southern Britain.

By the time that Hallstat culture gave way to La Tene Culture, probably sometime around 500 BCE, it had developed into what is easily recognizable as a Celtic culture. Both in terms of practical material technologies and in artwork, later Hallstat and early La Tene Cultures show a large degree of continuity with later widespread Celtic culture, and the peoples of both of these cultures almost certainly spoke Celtic languages, as opposed to the earlier Proto-Celtic that was probably typical of the populations making up the Urnfield Culture.

By the time of the La Tene Culture's height, Europe had also left its Bronze Age behind, progressing into the Iron Age. During this time, tools and weapons made of the much more durable iron become quite common, a trait that would continue with the known Celtic tribes, both in their metal artwork and their weapons. With this development, the stage was set for

classical Celtic culture to spread throughout almost all of Europe, which it would do in the centuries that followed. Though this developmental history of the Celts is only theoretical due to a general lack of written records, it is the one that is most widely accepted by scholars of Celtic and Proto-Celtic history today.

Precisely how the Celtic tribes and their cultural traditions spread is a matter of some debate. It is generally believed, however, that the Celtic culture originated in Germany before spreading throughout the continent (the order in which lands were exposed to it is quite unclear) to eventually encompass everything from the far eastern portions of modern Europe to the westernmost parts of the Iberian peninsula. Most interesting, however, is the history of what are known as the Insular Celts, or the Celtic groups that settled in the islands of Britain and Ireland. These Celts, due to their long and drawn out contact with the Roman Empire, would find themselves recorded somewhat more thoroughly than other Celtic groups in Roman literature, which today is one of the primary sources for modern research of the Celts. It should be noted, however, that the Romans often had a skewed and incomplete view of Celtic culture, and so the accounts left by them should be treated as such.

Though these early years of the Celtic tribes are somewhat uncertain, the archaeological evidence collected by modern researchers is sufficient that we can, for the most part, understand how Celtic Europe came to be by the time that it was encountered by the expanding empire of the Romans. Though often considered by them to be little more than groups of barbarians, the Celtic tribes were in fact quite complex as societal groups, having unique artistic and intellectual traditions that had been developed over the many centuries of advancement in Europe, starting in the time of the remote Beaker Culture. The Celts were also a group of peoples with a strong martial tradition that would in many cases challenge the ancient Roman army, arguably one of the greatest militaries ever produced by the ancient world.

Section Two

The Celts in the British Isles

As the Celts were not a single group, but rather a series of independent tribes, it is better to deal with Celtic history geographically, rather than chronologically. We will therefore begin our exploration of Celtic history in Europe with the known history of their habitation of Britain, the place from which they are best known.

Like other parts of Europe, Britain was not occupied simply by one Celtic tribes, but by many. These several individual tribes are generally classed into three basic tribal groupings for the sake of convenience. These three groups were the Britons, who occupied most of what is today England and Wales in the southern portion of the main island of Britain, the Gaels, who occupied some of Wales and Scotland but were most prominently found in Ireland, and the Picts, who occupied the northern reaches of the main island in what is today central and northern Scotland. Though in some ways very different, these groups are all generally believed to have been Celtic in origin. The possible exception is the Picts, about whose origin and relation to other groups in Britain and in mainland Europe is a matter of some legitimate dispute. Though the Picts may have been of some different cultural origin, it is widely believed that they were simply another branch of the Celtic tribes and, even if they were not, they certainly adopted much from the Celtic cultures that surrounded them and

dominated Europe in their day. Before continuing with our exploration of the history of the Celts in Britain, it should be clearly understood that there was little to no cohesion among most of these tribal groups, which are believed to have waged frequent wars against each other. Though they would form loose confederations from time to time, Britain's population during this period was highly fragmented and exhibited few signs of either political or military unity.

The arrival of the Celtic culture in Britain is a matter about which there is much discussion in the historical community. It was long assumed that, given their obvious similarities to the Celtic peoples elsewhere in Europe, the British Celts had arrived in Britain via migration and had displaced or interbred with prehistoric populations. However, modern scientific investigation into the genetic makeup of the populations of Britain and Ireland have cast significant doubt on this assumption, as there very little evidence that would suggest a new population having arrived in the islands at the time that Celtic culture spread into Britain. Two theories have been presented to explain Celtic culture in Britain within the context of these new findings. The first is that Celtic culture was adopted by the British populous through contact with the Celts and proto-Celtic peoples of continental Europe which occurred by way of the ancient European trade

routes that were already well-established by this time. The second theory suggests that the population of Britain, sharing ancestors with the European Celts in prehistory, simply developed along a similar line to their continental counterparts, eventually developing their own Celtic culture that was similar to but separate from the Celtic culture of the mainland. More than likely, there is at least a grain of truth in both of theories, and it is entirely possible that common cultural backgrounds and continued contact with the developing Celtic culture of Europe via trade helped to guide Celtic development in Britain.

Between the beginning of the Celtic period in Britain, thought to have occurred around roughly 500 BCE, and the Roman invasions and later conquest, Celtic art, culture and language spread throughout the island. During this period, we have little more than archaeological evidence to use in reconstructing what events may have transpired, a difficult task given the sheer number of known groups that were active in close proximity to each other. However, this lack of written source material was soon to change, as Rome, the rising empire of Italy that had swallowed much of Europe into itself, turned its sights to Britain as a potential target for conquest.

The first Roman invasion of Britain was attempted by the famous general and emperor Julius Caesar in 55 BCE. By this time, the frequent wars occurring between various Celtic tribal groups had resulted in the building of many fortified settlements situated on high ground. These Celtic forts would make the Roman conquest of Britain a difficult matter, especially when combined with the fact that the various Celtic tribes were fighting on land they knew well against an enemy that had stretched its supply lines far away from its own center of power. During this campaign, however, the first Roman descriptions of the Celts in Britain, known to the Romans simply as the Britons, were made. These early accounts are probably not entirely accurate, as it was to the benefit of the Romans to portray the Celtic tribes as barbarians to their own people, thus maintaining the narrative that Rome's imperial ambitions were also an expedient method of civilizing peoples that the Roman citizenry regarded as “barbarians.”

The best Roman account we have from this period of British history was actually penned by Julius Caesar himself as part of his collection, *Commentary on the Gallic War*. This work is also regarded as a primary source of information for the wars in Gaul (modern France), which we will discuss in the next section. Even Caesar, though far from a cultural anthropologist, was keenly aware of the many similarities between the

Celtic peoples of Britain and the Gauls, who were also a Celtic tribe. Caesar, however, was far more interested in their military characteristics than in the culture that they shared with other European peoples. His commentaries on his campaigns in Britain showcase the tactics used by the Celts of Britain in warfare, particularly describing their masterful use of chariots against the Romans in the field.

These commentaries are also an opportunity for modern historians to learn about specific Celtic rulers against whom Caesar fought. This is a rarity in much of Celtic history, as very few of the many leaders of the many tribes have been recorded specifically as individuals. This leader, named by Caesar as Cassivellaunus, led the defense of Britain during Caesar's second expedition to conquer the island, which occurred in 54 BCE. Cassivellaunus would ultimately find himself defeated by the Roman commander, though he would put up a particularly stiff fight against the Roman legions and even resort to mobile guerrilla warfare before surrendering. Caeser's account makes clear that the alliance of the tribes behind Cassivellaunus was an unusual occurrence, as the tribal king had been at war with most of his neighbors until Caesar first arrived in Britain in 54 BCE.

This dynamic of tribal conflict was one that also produced pro-Roman groups within the Celtic population of Britain. For example, a prince of the Trinovantes, a tribe situated in the southeast of the island of Britain, found himself in support of Caesar against the forces of Cassivellaunus in exchange for restoration to the kingship of his people by Caesar, which he had been deprived of by Cassivellaunus. This prince, named Mandubracius, would go on to regain control of the Trinovantes after the defeat of Cassivellaunus.

Though Cassivellaunus was eventually defeated, the Romans would find themselves only in partial control of the Britons, exerting some influence over the southern parts of the island but not truly ruling it. It would not be until the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius that southern Britain would truly become a Roman province. The invasion under Claudius began in 43 CE, and would pit the Roman legions against one of the most impressive Celtic tribal leaders in the history of Britain, a man known as Caractacus. Caractacus was the king of the Catuvellauni tribe, probably the same tribal group that had been ruled by Cassivellaunus in the time of Julius Caesar.

Caractacus and his seat of power in what is today Colchester were the primary targets of the Roman invasion under Claudius. The taking of

Colchester, then known by the name Camulodunon, was accomplished fairly early in the invasion, but Caractacus himself was not captured, and soon rallied his forces against those of Rome, which had set up a pro-Roman colony in his former territories. Though the first invasion under Julius had occurred nearly 100 years before, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the fragmented Celtic tribes would have had a clear understanding of what a second invasion by the Romans meant for them and the lands that they held power over. Banding together two other tribes named in the Roman histories, those of the Silures and the Ordovices (doubtlessly recognizable to those with a knowledge of paleontology as the respective sources for names of the Silurian and Ordovician eras of remote prehistory on Earth), Caractacus led a counteroffensive campaign against the new Roman rulers of southern Britain.

The result of this new alliance under Caractacus would be the battle of Caer Caradoc, a major battle that pitted organized Celtic armies against the Roman legions. In the popular mind, it is often assumed that the Celts fought only as small, disorganized bands. However, even the Romans recognized the Celts of Britain as a formidable and highly capable military force, hardly consistent with their own evaluation of the Celtic peoples as uncivilized barbarians. This battle, fought in 50 CE, forced the Romans to

come out in force against a Britannic enemy. The empire fielded two legions, commanded by Publius Ostorius Scapula, who by this time was the governor of the Roman colonies in Britain (Aulus Plautius had been the first governor, succeeded by Scapula after a brief governorship).

The Celtic Britons established a strong position in the battle of Caer Caradoc, whose location is today unknown, by seizing higher ground in a hilly region and building stone ramparts from which to fight a defensive action against the Roman force of more than 20,000 men. They also made use of this elevated position to use ranged weapons against their Roman foes, a tactic that would have likely been devastatingly effective against a less well-trained enemy. The Romans, however, had encountered such tactics many times before and made use of a formation called the *testudo* (literally meaning tortoise) to block against it. The *testudo* formation was achieved by the soldiers on the front and sides of the formation forming an encircling wall around the force with their large shields while those in the center lifted their shields above their heads to form an armored shell around the entire formation. Under this layer of shields, the Roman forces could move effectively against even the heaviest barrages of spears, arrows or stones raining down upon them.

Illustration 2: The Celtic king Caractacus (left) portrayed in his appearance before the emperor Claudies (seated right)

Crossing a river, which is generally thought to have been the river Severn, the Roman forces dismantled the stone defenses and launched a full assault on the positions held by Caractacus. The Britons, though they put up a hard fight, were eventually defeated by the Roman force. It is not known how many Britons were present at the battle of Caer Caradoc, but it is entirely possible that the forces of Caractacus found themselves outnumbered once the Roman legions had made it up the slopes to do battle with them. Once again, Caractacus managed to escape from the field without being captured by the Romans. His forces, however, were shattered, and his wife and children were taken captive by the Roman

forces during his retreat. Caractacus himself would soon be taken prisoner by the Romans when Cartimandua, the queen of a tribe called the Brigantes, turned him over to them after he had sought shelter with her. This move was massively unpopular among the Celtic population, as Caractacus was widely viewed as a hero of British resistance to the Romans. With his capture, however, southern Britain became a relatively stable Roman province. Caractacus himself would end out his days as a captive in Rome, though one treated with the utmost care and courtesy. His staunch military resistance to the power of Rome and a great speech he gave before the Roman Senate so impressed his captors that he was spared execution and received a full pardon for his actions.

Though Rome had captured the south of Celtic Britain, its inhabitants were still far from fully resigned to Roman rule. Within only a few years, the Iceni, a tribe that had at first supported the Romans in their conquest of Britain, would rise up in revolt against imperial rule. This revolt would be led by probably the most impressive woman in all of British Celtic history, a queen of the Iceni named Boudica. Boudica was the wife of the former king of the Iceni, whose name was Prasutagus. After the king's death, his plan for his kingdom to be ruled in unison by his children and by the emperors of Rome, as had been the arrangement during his own

lifetime, was tossed aside by the Romans in favor of complete Roman rule over Iceni territory. To add insult to injury and to demonstrate their power over the Iceni, the Romans publicly flogged Boudica and raped her daughters. The result of these actions would be the greatest uprising in Europe that the Romans had faced since the Germanic rebellions during the reign of the emperor Augustus nearly half a century before.

Under Boudica, the Iceni combined with other Celtic tribes to stage a mass revolution against Gaius Suetonius Paulinus, who by that time had become the governor of the parts of Britain that were under Roman rule. Paulinus was in the process of campaigning in Wales, which the Romans were still trying to fully secure as a colony. Welsh borderlands had become a stronghold for rebellious Celtic groups, which also harbored Druids, members of the priestly class of the Celts in Britain, Ireland and Gaul (Druidic beliefs and practices are discussed in more detail in the section dealing with Celtic religion). Since the time of Julius, Druids had been persecuted as not only the religious but also the intellectual leaders of the Celtic tribes, making any place that gave them refuge in number a target for Roman forces. This campaign into Wales, however, would prove to be a military disaster for Paulinus, not because of the forces that awaited him

there, but because of the one that was massing in the lands already under his rule.

Boudica and her large army first moved against Colchester in 60 or 61 CE, the place where the period of Roman rule of Britain could be said to have begun. The city, which was poorly defended with Paulinus out on campaign, fell easily to the Celtic forces. Boudica's army nearly destroyed Colchester, which was seen as symbolic of Roman rule due to the fact that a temple to the deified late emperor Claudius had been erected there following the conquest of southern Britain. The blow would have been devastating for the Romans, as no Celtic rebellion before on the island had ever managed to destroy a major Roman-controlled city. With Colchester destroyed, however, Boudica set her sights on an even larger prize, the recently founded city of Londinium, today known as Britain's capital city of London.

Before the rebels could move form Colchester, a Roman force would try unsuccessfully to retake the city. This force, the Ninth Legion, was almost completely destroyed by Boudica's rebel army. The result of the battle made it clear that this rebellion would not be simply and easily put down. The defeat of a legion in a pitched battle was a rare event for the Romans,

made all the more humiliating by the fact that the peoples they had lost to were regarded by most of Rome as simple barbarians who were not equal to Rome's splendor or military prowess. With the Ninth Legion defeated, the Romans were forced to acknowledge Boudica as a serious threat to Roman control of Britain.

When Boudica's forces reached Londinium, they once again found the city poorly defended and incapable of offering any serious resistance to them. Suetonius had, by this point, returned from his campaign in Wales after hearing of the destruction of the Ninth Legion. However, due to the size of Boudica's forces, which may have been as many as 100,000 (the Roman historian Cassius Dio states 230,000, but recognized that this number included the families of the soldiers and many other non-military personnel), Suetonius was in no position to engage the Iceni queen in the field. Londinium was burned to the ground, a historical account confirmed by archaeological findings in the city of London, where one of the lowest layers is a consistent layer of ash originating from this burning. The city, a major center of trade and one of the greatest Roman cities in Britain, would have to be completely rebuilt after the Celtic rebellion.

Illustration 3: Modern statue showing Boudicca standing atop a Celtic chariot prepared for battle.

With the cities that are today Colchester and London destroyed, the Ninth Legion defeated and the governor of Britain hesitant to engage her in the field, Boudica's chances of successfully driving the Roman invaders out of her country must have seemed quite high. Suetonius, however, was not yet defeated, and the last stand he would organize to defeat the Celtic tribes in rebellion would prove to be Boudica's downfall. Rallying two legions, the Fourteenth and Twentieth, Suetonius engaged Boudica along the great road known as Watling Street, which the Romans had built over a pre-existing Celtic footpath after the conquest of Britain. The Battle of Watling Street, as it is known today, was to be one of the greatest battles in all of British history.

At the outset of the battle, the advantage was, without any serious doubt, in favor of Boudica. Fielding a vastly larger army than the Romans and having already successfully destroyed one legion in open combat, the queen would have had every reason to believe that the battle before her would essentially end the Roman control of Celtic Britain. However, the deployments on the battlefield favored Suetonius, who had stationed his smaller army in a gap between two hills and with a dense forest covering his rear, making a flanking maneuver virtually impossible for the larger force before him.

As Boudica's massive army advanced, it would have found itself squeezed into an ever-tightening space approaching the Roman position, mitigating the usefulness of the larger number of troops significantly. The Romans, being among the most disciplined and well-trained soldiers of the ancient world, carefully held their ground, allowing the enemy army to close in against them without breaking ranks. Once the front lines of the charging Celtic army had gotten close enough, flights of javelins were launched by the Roman soldiers, killing many of the first ranks of enemy combatants. This tactic proved to be incredibly effective against the Celts, who traditionally wore little in the way of armor and, according to some accounts, even charged into battle naked (see the section on Celtic military

traditions for more information). With its enemy badly disorganized by the impact of thousands of javelins, the Roman force began an assault, marching forward in closed ranks so as not to allow their enemy to penetrate their lines. This cautious advance was combined with an assault of heavy cavalry, which further broke the organization of the Celtic forces.

Boudica's army fell into a retreat, but soon found itself packed into a killing zone between the advancing Romans and a line of supply wagons that they had placed at their own rear before the outset of the battle. If ancient accounts are to be believed, the result was a massacre, with tens of thousands of British Celts, including the non-combatants that had accompanied Boudica's army, being slaughtered by the Romans under Suetonius. Boudica herself is believed to have escaped from the battle, but died only very shortly afterward of either self-poisoning or an unspecified illness (the Roman accounts vary). Though this would not end the rebellions that plagued the Romans in Britain, it was the ending of the uprising that had had the best chance of forcing them out of British Celtic territories altogether.

Throughout the next several decades, the struggle between the Celts and their unpopular Roman rulers continued. Another attempt at a major

rebellion occurred in 69 CE, a year in which the rule of Rome was shifted among four separate emperors in the space of a single year. This rebellion, however, would prove to be less successful than Boudica's, and though it did major damage to some centers of Roman rule, the uprising would not seriously threaten the Roman hold over the island. Gradually, the Romans moved northward, taking in parts of southern Scotland and, in doing so, made more complete contact with the other two major Celtic sub-groups in Britain, the Gaels and the Picts. The latter of these peoples, however, would probably have had few direct dealings with the Romans.

The Picts, unlike many other groups in Britain, were a somewhat organized alliance of various tribes. This alliance had probably been formed in response to the Roman threat, though it is possible that it predated the Roman occupation and may have been formed to field common defenses in the frequent tribal warfare of Celtic Britain. Centered in northern Scotland, the Picts were spared the ravages of the Roman armies for many decades due to the remoteness of their lands, especially in the case of those that were situated in the Scottish highlands. Rome, however, was a power that rarely passed up an opportunity to expand into new territories. By sometime in the very late first century CE, the Romans appear to have established a significant military presence in the lowlands

of what is today southern Scotland. Records from this period are scarce, and the most common archaeological remains in these areas with a connection to Rome are frontier forts. It is very possible that the southernmost Pictish tribes may have encountered Roman armies in this lowland region of Scotland. The primary inhabitants of these regions, however, were Britons, rather than Picts. Whether or not the Pictish tribes were involved, a frontier conflict for what is today Scotland soon ensued.

This conflict may have been in progress by the earliest years of the 2nd century CE, but it is very likely that it did not reach its apex until about 115-120 CE. The frontier clashes would eventually force the emperor Hadrian to build his now famous eponymous wall over the frontier border in order to separate the nothern lands from Roman Britain and to guard against Celtic forces moving south into northern England. In the 140s CE, the Romans would again push into the Scottish lowlands, this time establishing a less well-known wall called the Antonine Wall at the new border to prevent the Picts in the areas to the north from attacking the newly re-Romanized southern Scottish territory. This arrangement would not last long, as by the 160s CE the frontier of Roman Britain had once again been pushed back to the original wall built at the command of Hadrian.

Illustration 4: Remaining foundation of a watchtower along Hadrian's Wall, built to separate Roman territory in Britain from the free Celtic tribes to the north.

With the Britons and of England occupied by Roman legions and gradually adapting to the rule of the Italian empire and the various peoples of Scotland fighting ferociously to keep the Romans at bay, there was one major group of Celtic tribes that found themselves largely unhampered by Rome. These were the Gaels that at this time inhabited the nearby island of Ireland. It was here that Celtic culture flourished even as the Romans spread their influence over the island of Britain. Though the emperor Nero may have sent an expedition to explore the island during his fairly brief rule, there is no evidence that the Romans ever exerted either political or military control over the island, and indeed no evidence that they ever

made any serious attempt to invade it. This left Ireland, one of the very few places in Europe that was not under Roman control, a free haven for Celtic culture to continue with very little influence from Rome.

By the end of the second century CE, the basic political dynamic of the relations between the Celtic tribes of Britain and the Romans was more or less established. There would, of course, be continued rebellions from Celtic tribes as time passed, as the Romans were never popular nor widely acknowledged as the legitimate rulers of the British tribal lands. Over the coming centuries, however, the Celtic tribes of the island of Britain would find themselves adopting more and more Roman influence due to the long term exposure to the empire. The Pictish tribes of Scotland, in particular one known as the Caledonii, would gradually become more involved in the defense of Scotland against incorporation into the Roman Empire, but the areas of Britain that had been brought firmly under Roman control would stabilize over time.

By the time of the Roman Empire's decline in the early 5th century CE, another cultural influence would spread from Rome that would greatly change the culture of the Celtic groups in both Britain and Ireland. This influence was the still relatively young religion of Christianity, which had

been made the official state religion of Rome by Constantine the Great. The spread of Christianity, which had itself developed within the cultural context of the Roman Empire, would lead to the adoption of Roman cultural characteristics even among the Celtic tribes of Ireland and northern Scotland, which until this time had largely managed to avoid the phenomenon of Romanization that had been slowly occurring in the southern and mid sections of the island of Britain since the reign of Claudius. Though these influences would certainly dilute the pure Celtic cultural traditions that had dominated Britain and Ireland before the coming of the Romans, much of these traditions would remain, particularly in the areas that had never been conquered by Rome.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in 410 CE, the British Isles joined the rest of Europe in entering what we today call the Dark Ages. In Britain, however, Celtic culture survived in a way that it did nowhere else in Europe. Once the Roman empire had fallen, migrations of tribal groups became incredibly common within the power vacuum that the empire had left in its place. Such movements largely wiped out the Celtic cultural traditions that had dominated many parts of Europe for nearly 1,000 years. Britain and Ireland, thanks to their separation from mainland Europe, were mostly spared these upheavals (with the prominent exception of the

invasion of the Germanic Saxon tribe, which occupied much of the formerly Roman-controlled areas of southern Britain), allowing for a hybrid Roman-Celtic culture to survive the Dark Ages.

It is because of this very phenomenon that all Celtic languages that are still in existence and use today are to be found in the British Isles. Today, a total of six Celtic languages can still be found in use. These are Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, Manx, Cornish and Breton. As surviving Celtic languages, these six have been invaluable to modern linguistic researchers in reconstructing more archaic branches of the Celtic language family.

Though the British and Irish Celts were eventually Romanized to a certain degree, these groups held out as one of the last bastions of the Celtic culture well into the Middle Ages. In time, the influences brought by the Viking and Norman invasions would create the basis of the British culture that we know today, eventually spreading into Ireland, Scotland and Wales with the conquests of historic kings of England throughout the Middle Ages. Even with these developments, however, elements of Celtic civilization endured into the modern era in language and customs in the

British Isles. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the popular mind, the Celts are so strongly associated with Britain and Ireland today.

Section Three

The Gallic Tribes

Though many people today equate the region known as Gaul only with France, it was in fact a geographic term used by the ancient Romans to describe much of western and central Europe. Today, the region once called Gaul covers the modern countries of France, Belgium, parts of southern Germany, Switzerland and some portions of Italy. The region of Gaul played a key role in Celtic history, as it was known to the Romans by the proper name of Gallia Celtica and thus was the source of the name that was much later applied to the many Celtic tribes.

As the tribal groups that were most closely situated to Rome itself, the Gauls were very likely the first point of contact between the Romans and the Celts. Prior to the Romans, however, it is known that the Greeks had some degree of contact with these Celtic peoples, and the proximity of

Italy to parts of Gaul makes it quite plausible that the Etruscans, the major civilization in the Italian peninsula prior to the rise of Rome, would have had fairly extensive dealings with them. Fragments of a historical work written by a Greek geographer and historian named Posidonius dealing with the tribes of Gaul are thought to have been the major work on the subject in the ancient world. The original work, now lost, was probably the best source of information about these tribes prior to Julius Caesar's campaign to subjugate Gaul.

Unlike the Celts in Britain, there is a relatively large amount of information available to modern historians about some of the activities of the Gauls in the time before the Roman conquests. Beginning in the 4th century BCE, migrating Gallic groups began what ancient sources describe as an invasion of the Balkans. In 280 and 279 BCE, invading groups of Gauls took part in an event that is historically known as the Great Expedition. Among the leaders of this invasion was a tribal king whose name is recorded by contemporary sources as Brennus (other leaders are also recorded, but Brennus seems to have been the principle commander of the Gallic army). At first, this army took Thrace and Macedon, two historic regions situated just to the north of central mainland Greece. Soon, however, the force would move to challenge the ancient city-states

of Greece, which by this time had somewhat passed the heights of their history but which were still formidable regional powers.

In 279 BCE, Brennus' army met the Greeks, who had put themselves under Athenian leadership (as was fairly common when forming military alliances), at the pass of Thermopylae, where the Greek forces had decided to stage a defensive action to deny the Gauls access to the lands of the city-states. This tactic had served other Greek armies well in the past, as the pass was also the site of the more famous battle in which a group of Spartan-led Greeks had inflicted massive casualties on a Persian army commanded by Xerxes the Great earlier in Greek history. As at the original battle, the Greek forces deployed themselves in a closed rank formation across the narrow pass. Heavy armor and long spears gave the Greek soldiers, known as hoplites, a marked advantage in this type of defensive situation.

Initially, the Greek defensive line held against Brennus, whose forces were likely already weary from having had to approach Thermopylae by crossing a large river by wading or swimming after the Greek cavalry had destroyed the bridges that spanned it. The pass being as narrow as it was at that time, Brennus must have been clearly able to see how high the cost in

human life would have been for his forces to take it, and next tried to even the odds by reducing the number of the Greek fighters blocking the advance of his army. Though much of Greece was beyond the pass and inaccessible to his forces, Brennus was able to move forces toward the region known as Aetolia, most of the army of which was already engaged with him at Thermopylae. By attacking the Aetolian homeland, Brennus correctly reasoned, he would be able to reduce the size of the defensive force at Thermopylae. Though this tactic proved effective in drawing the Aetolians out to defend their own lands, it cost Brennus roughly 20,000 men when the force he had sent to Aetolia was eventually defeated and left him no closer to breaking the Greek line at Thermopylae.

Much as the Persian army had done in the earlier and better-known conflict at Thermopylae, the army of Brennus eventually found a road around the pass that would allow them to turn the Greek line. This time, however, the Greeks did not make a last stand, instead removing their forces in an orderly retreat by sea. Though this left Brennus at liberty to move his forces south toward the rest of the Greek city-states, the battle and the Aetolian expedition had cost him dearly in the lives of his troops and proven that, though the Celts were fierce warriors in the field, their

armies were not up to the task of defeating the heavily armored hoplites of Greece.

The army of Brennus was later defeated in an attempt to attack the city of Delphi, ending the invasion of Greece by the Celts. Though they had failed to take Greece, the Celts had succeeded in acquiring new territories and expanding their boundaries significantly. Aside from Thrace, which would remain partially under Gallic control for some time, the Celts also would go on to settle in what is today Turkey, forming the region which was known to the Romans as Galatia. Galatia found itself as an interesting hybrid under Celtic rule, incorporating the strong Greek and Near Eastern cultural influences that were already common in the area from its long history of association with both the Greeks and the peoples of Mesopotamia and Iran with the Celtic culture that was brought by its new rulers from central and western Europe. The tribes of the Gauls in Galatia would retain their independence until the middle of the first century BCE, when the expanding Roman empire finally managed to incorporate this region of Anatolia into its sphere of political and military influence.

Illustration 5: Detail of an ancient coin showing Amyntas, a 1st century BCE king of Galatia who was almost certainly of Celtic descent.

While these events occurred far to the east of the region of Gaul, the Celtic tribes in the west still maintained their hold over Europe. Unlike the Celts in Britain, however, they were gradually exposed to Greek and Roman culture long before they found themselves annexed into the Roman Empire. This resulted in more extensive urbanization in Gaul than is generally believed to have occurred in the context of the Celtic tribes of Britain, which retained a more purely Celtic culture before the Roman invasion because of their more insulated island homeland. This more urban way of life and the material prosperity that came with it made Gaul a rich target for the Romans in the creation of their European empire. This wealth is acutely evidenced by the many fine golden artifacts that have been found in the region that was then Gaul, as well as the early gold

mines from which the precious metal for these ornaments would have been extracted.

It should be noted that, much like Celtic Britain, Gaul was not a politically or culturally homogeneous region. The Romans described the populations of Gaul by dividing them into three separate groups with many tribes being categorized under each group, not unlike the system used to describe the Celts in Britain. These were the Gauls themselves, who were definitively a Celtic people with a distinctly Celtic language and culture, the Aquatani, a group of non-Celtic peoples who are believed to have been the precursors of the Basque population of modern France and Spain, and the Belgae, who are believed to have been a hybrid group formed out of the overlap between Celtic and Germanic peoples in the northern areas of Gaul. Though there was much interaction between these groups, we will herein concern ourselves principally with the people known to the Romans as the Gauls, as it was they who made up the principle Celtic population.

Rome's early expansions into Europe resulted in the annexing of some parts of Gaul, specifically those geographically closest to Rome itself, into the empire. Parts of northwestern Italy, called Cisalpine Gaul in ancient

times, are believed to have been among the earliest centers of Celtic and Proto-Celtic culture in Europe. Beginning with the Canegrate Culture, an extremely early cultural breakaway from Urnfield Culture, the area had been continuously inhabited for more than 1,000 years by the Celts and their ancestors. The area was brought into the Roman empire during the early first century BCE, though records exist that indicate wars between the Celts of northwestern Italy and the peoples of southern Italy as early as the early 4th century BCE. Indeed, the city of Rome itself was sacked in 390 BCE by the Senones, of the many Gallic tribes from this region. This small piece of Celtic territory in Italy, however, would only be the beginning of the Roman expansion into Gaul.

Before setting out on his expedition against the Celtic tribes of Britain, Julius Caesar would fight a much more successful series of campaigns in Gaul that would result in the annexation of huge amounts of Celtic territory into the growing Roman Empire. By the time these campaigns began in 58 BCE, Rome and the Gallic tribes had an incredibly complex relationship. Though relations with many of the tribes were often peaceful and even included regular trade, there was also a long history of military conflict with the Gauls stretching back to the 4th century sacking of Rome. During the late 3rd century BCE, many Celtic tribes had joined the armies

of the famous Carthaginian commander Hannibal during his attempted invasion of Italy, and an independent Gallic invasion of Italy had been staged late in the 2nd century BCE. This mixed relationship with the Gauls was accompanied by what seems to have been a genuine Roman respect for their martial abilities. Celtic armies, as we have previously seen, could be extremely effective in battle. Caesar would have been all too well aware of this fact prior to his invasion of Gaul, as he had done battle with Celtic tribes regionally earlier in his career. Even for the Romans, therefore, the invasion would have been a massive military undertaking. The campaigns of Caesar that eventually resulted in the taking of Gaul would come to be called the Gallic Wars.

Though a war between the Romans and the Gauls was most likely inevitable given the complex political situation between them, the event that ultimately did lead to the beginning of the Gallic Wars was an attempt on the part of the Helvetii, an alliance of several Gallic tribes, to migrate westward from their homeland in what is today Switzerland. This migration, however, soon took on a military aspect, though contemporary accounts suggest that that the Helvetii attempted at first to procure peaceful passage through the lands of other Gallic tribes and through the parts of Gaul that were already in Roman hands.

Caesar blocked the movement of the Helvetii in what was then known as Transalpine Gaul, or the region of Gaul that lay on the other side of the Alps from Rome. Though several minor engagements occurred between the two, there would not be a major battle until Caesar, now in command of five legions and many additional troops conscripted from the provinces, moved to block the Helvetii migration by another route. Caesar had already destroyed their initial planned route, a large wooden bridge that would have allowed them to cross the Rhone river at what is today Geneva. Rather than engage the Romans there, the Helvetii decided to make their way westward by a different route which took them over the Saone river. This strategy was a sound one, as it would allow the Helvetii to bypass the legions and the extensive fortifications that Caesar had constructed around his position. Caesar, however, had also sent out scouting parties to monitor the Helvetii movements. He was informed of their new route too late to catch the Celtic army before it crossed the Saone, but caught up to it just as its last quarter was preparing to make its way across the river. The result was a decisive Roman victory, though a largely empty one as the main force of the Helvetii had already made the crossing. This battle, known as the Battle of the Arar after the ancient

Roman name for the Saone, is generally considered to have been the starting action of the Gallic Wars.

The next major conflict would come at the Battle of Bibracte after a protracted period of skirmishing warfare between the two armies while Caesar pursued the Helvetii westward. The battle occurred in what is today west-central France. Caesar had moved to Bibracte in order to resupply his armies with help from the Aedui, one of the tribes of Gaul that was strongly allied to Rome. One of the leaders of this tribe, named Dumnorix, had decided, however, to support the Helvetii against Caesar and arranged for the supplies needed by the Roman legions to be delayed to hamper their movements. The Helvetii, seeing their opportunity to catch their Roman adversary off guard, launched a cavalry attack on the rear section of Caesar's line before attacking in force. The betrayal of Dumnorix is an important illustration of the fact that, even among the tribes that had allied with Rome, there was rarely a consensus among the Celts as to whether to support or oppose the Roman Empire.

Caesar established a defensive position high up on a hill that overlooked mostly flat land around it. With his heavily armed legions deployed in this fashion, the Helvetii had little chance of defeating him, especially with

each Roman legionnaire armed with the two javelins that were typically carried with them. The Helvetii, too, had a hilltop position backing their lines a short distance away, but had only established it as a safe place to keep their supply wagons while the attack was carried out. Once the Romans had successfully halted the advance of the Helvetii, they advanced off of their higher position to engage the Gauls in open combat on the flat land below.

Though the tide of the battle may have seemed to turn when the Helvetii began their retreat, the real fighting was only beginning. With the legions drawn away from their defensive position and onto ground where they could be more easily attacked, two more tribes that had decided to support the Helvetii, the Tulingi and the Boii (the latter was almost certainly a Celtic tribe, but the cultural background of the former is entirely unknown), arrived with what Caesar recounts as a combined force of 15,000 more soldiers to add to the battle on the side of the Gauls.

Given this situation, it is likely that only the discipline of the Roman army kept it from defeat at Bibracte. The Gauls far outnumbered them (Caesar reports 90,000 Helvetii to his 50,000 legionnaires), and had gained the element of surprise. Had the Celtic tribes of Gaul managed to break the

Roman lines at this juncture, it probably would have turned the tide of the battle into a significant victory of the Gauls over the Roman legions. However, Caesar and his sub-commanders succeeded in maintaining an orderly formation, allocating different legions to the individual tasks of fighting off the two new tribes that had arrived with fresh fighters and keeping pressure on the Helvetii to prevent them from regrouping and launching an organized counteroffensive against the Roman line. Even so, the battle apparently lasted for several hours before the steady Roman advance brought the legions to the top of the hill on which the Helvetii had placed their supply wagons and their non-combatant citizens to keep them away from the fray of the battle. With this, the Battle of Bibracte was won by the Romans and what remained of the Helvetii were sent into a full retreat. Of the 368,000 total Helvetii present (of whom the vast majority were the non-combatants), Caesar reports that only 130,000 avoided being captured or killed. The remaining Helvetii would surrender a short time later after escaping to the lands of another Celtic tribe, the Lingones, who would not risk sheltering or supporting them due to the threat of the nearby Roman legions.

Even though the Helvetii had been defeated and, for the most part, killed or captured during their attempt to move to the west, Gaul was still

massively populated with Celtic tribes, many of which were still on relatively good terms with Rome. At the behest of one of these Celtic groups, Caesar would next turn his attention to the Suebi, a group of Germanic tribes that was actively attempting to invade and expand into lands held by Celtic Gauls. Because we are here principally concerned with the Celtic peoples of Europe as separate from the Germanic peoples, we will not explore this phase of the Gallic Wars in detail, except to note that the Germanic invasion was repelled in a series of battles that took place later in the year 58 BCE following the campaigns against the Helvetii. This concurrence of Germanic and Celtic history also nicely illustrates the fact that, in many instances, the two populations lived in such close proximity and had so many dealings with each other that their histories are tightly intertwined. As we will see later, this is especially true following the fall of the Roman Empire in the west, when Germanic tribes expanded into almost all of the Celtic lands that had constituted Gaul.

The next phase of the Gallic Wars which principally concerned the Celtic tribes of Gaul came in 57 BCE. This time, Caesar would campaign in what is today Belgium to attack a confederation of tribes there that had recently launched assaults on pro-Roman Gallic tribes. As we have previously discussed, the Belgic tribes are generally considered to have been a hybrid

of Celtic and Germanic cultures, probably resulting from the migration of some Germanic groups into a pre-existing Celtic cultural context. Archaeological finds in Belgium, however, show a considerable presence of La Tene Culture there in the years predating the Roman expansion into this part of Europe, making it quite likely that the Celtic culture was still predominant in Belgium by the time of Caesar.

The Belgic tribes, led by what Caesar notes was the especially warlike Nervii tribe and supported by some of the several regional Celtic tribes that opposed Roman rule, were grouping on a river known in ancient times as the Sabis when Caesar first pushed into the territory of the Nervii. The Nervii had received intelligence about the disposition of the Roman army under Julius Caesar, which consisted at this time of eight full legions. Originally, the army had been deployed with supply trains behind each legion, leaving a vulnerable space between each major section of the army that could be exploited in an ambush by the Belgic tribes. This led the Nervii to the strategy of laying in wait until the first line of supply wagons came into view, allowing them to cut off the first legion in line and then disperse before the other legions would be able to relieve it, thus weakening the Roman army facing them. Unfortunately for the tribes under the leadership of the Nervii, however, Caesar serendipitously would

change this deployment before their planned ambush, reverting to the more traditional layout of keeping the legions close together with the supply train for the entire army massed in the rear.

When the Nervii and their allies attacked, they found themselves attacking a supply train that constituted the very rear of the Roman army, guarded only by the mobile Roman cavalry. The legions, meanwhile, were setting up their camps ahead. The Nervii, however, quickly adapted to this change in the scenario and pressed a full assault on the legions, which received virtually no advance warning and had no time to prepare fortifications. For much of the battle, the legions would remain heavily pressed and disorganized, though Caesar would eventually manage to rally them. The Nervii and their other Celtic allies, according to Caesar's account, fought to the death and managed to do combat on roughly even footing with the legions for much of the battle. The tide, however, would turn when the legions finally managed to regroup and began to advance against the Belgic army. The Nervii would eventually be all but wiped out at the Battle of the Sabis, as Caesar notes that it was only in the final moments of the battle that the few survivors of the tribe retreated from the battlefield. Though the day had nearly gone to the Celtic tribes, the

Romans were once again victorious. With this victory, both Belgae and Gaul were now almost totally in Roman control.

Throughout the coming two years, Caesar would continue to campaign in Europe before eventually turning toward Britain in 55 BCE. These campaigns would be launched against the remaining anti-Roman tribes of the Celts, as well as the Germanic peoples who were still strongly opposed to the Roman expansion into the lands close to their own. By the time he crossed the English Channel into Britain, Caesar had expanded Roman power into many of the predominantly Celtic regions of Europe, including northern France, which until that time had been a major refuge of Celtic culture. The Celtic tribes of Europe, however, would not easily submit to Roman rule. Much as in Britain, the tribes of Gaul would soon rise up against Rome in an attempt to regain the independent rule of their own lands.

This rebellion would begin in 54 BCE and would initially be led by a Belgic prince named Ambiorix, a leader of the Eburones. Much debate has taken place in the academic community as to whether or not the Eburones were truly Celts, as Caesar identifies them as Germanic in his own accounts. However, as with other Belgic groups in the area at the time, it is

generally believed that the Eburones were a Celtic tribe which had, through Germanic migration, taken on some linguistic and cultural elements of the Germanic tribes. The rebellion of Ambiorix, which would eventually set the stage for a more general Gallic revolution, began with the attack of a Roman frontier fort in Belgic territory and the defeat of a Roman column attempting to escape it before being besieged by the Eburones. Though Caesar was not present at this battle, Gaul was still largely under his control, and it would not be long before he would mobilize his forces to deal with Ambiorix.

Caesar's retaliation to what was comparatively a minor revolt was overwhelmingly disproportionate. Combining five legions under his command, the noted general systematically attacked not only the Eburones, but also any tribe that offered them any form of assistance. Over the course of multiple campaigns against individual tribal lands, Caesar ravaged Belgic Gaul, destroying its food supplies and in many cases ordering massive executions of populations. Some tribes, the Eburones included, did not survive these campaigns as peoples due to the sheer number of deaths that occurred at the hands of the Roman legions. This campaign of destruction would greatly disrupt the ancient Celtic culture that had been perpetuated by most of these tribal groups as the Romans

imposed their own culture almost exclusively over Gaul. The hatred of the Celtic groups that survived these ravages for the Romans increased exponentially, and another revolution fueled by anger over Caesar's actions would occur not long after his campaign in modern Belgium ended.

This larger revolution of the Celtic Gauls would be led by Vercingetorix, the leader of the Arverni tribe. Vercingetorix brought to his revolution a new concept, that of uniting the Celtic groups in Gaul against the Romans. Deep division and long histories of conflict between the tribes had made the systematic conquest of Gaul much easier for Caesar that it would have been had be been fighting a unified enemy over such large geographic areas containing such large populations. Vercingetorix, therefore, sought to create a unified Gallic resistance to the imposing Romans to once and for all drive them out of the Celtic lands and return Gaul to internal rule. In early 52 BCE, he began to cement the tribal alliances necessary to raise a massive Celtic army against Caesar, who had then returned to northern Italy due to political instability in Rome.

Once his army of 100,000 or more Celts had been assembled, Vercingetorix embarked on a campaign designed to draw Caesar's army into what is today France across an inhospitable countryside. In order to

do this, the Celtic commander made use of a scorched-earth campaign, destroying cities, towns, villages and most other infrastructure that could have been used by Caesar for support, as well as destroying much of the food supply of that region of Gaul. The goal of these actions appears to have been to weaken the Roman army as much as possible as it marched to confront his own army, thus leveling the odds when he and Caesar, who was without doubt one of the greatest generals ever produced by Rome, met in combat.

Illustration 6: A modern statue depicting Vercingetorix.

Vercingetorix first attempted to engage Caesar in the field, very likely reasoning that a prolonged campaign might have given his Roman foes

time to call for more forces from Rome or from other provinces of the empire. This attack, however, would end in failure thanks to Caesar's use of Germanic cavalry pulled from the tribes of Germany that had decided to support Rome out of political convenience. This cavalry, when combined with the infantry power of the Roman legions, proved to be too much for the unified Gallic forces to attack successfully. Vercingetorix, it seems, did not press this assault after realizing that his forces would not be able to deal a decisive blow to the Romans and instead opted to establish a defensive position that the Roman legions would be forced to attack. This defensive action would occur at a fortified town known as Alesia.

Alesia offered a nearly perfect defensive position due to being placed on a high hill and being naturally anchored on either side by a river. Such a position, even for the legions of Rome, would have been far too costly to attack with a head-on assault. Caesar, therefore, reverted to siege tactics to win the battle. Though the Romans generally preferred to fight openly in the field, they were also adept at siege warfare. At Alesia, Caesar arranged a massive engineering effort in the form of an encircling wall built around the settlement to prevent Celtic forces from moving past the Roman line covertly. The wall is believed to have been 11 miles in total length, a gigantic undertaking for a Roman army in hostile territory.

While the Romans worked on their wall, however, Vercingetorix was busily attempting to draw new forces to Alesia from the Celtic tribes of Gaul. Before any of these forces could arrive, however, Caesar's forces had completed the encircling wall, along with another similar fortification beyond it to stop the approach of any other armies that might come to Vercingetorix's aid. From the standpoint of military engineering, the Battle of Alesia is a fascinating example of one of the most complex siege plans devised by a commander of the ancient world. By the time both walls were completed and complemented by various water-courses and traps, the Roman army had, for all intents and purposes, built its own temporary settlement completely encircling an existing town for the sole purpose of besieging it while fending off enemy forces.

Though a major Celtic army would eventually come to relieve Vercingetorix, the Gauls had already given the Romans too much time to entrench. The new army coordinated attacks with the defenders of Alesia, but could not effectively break past the Roman fortifications. This relieving army was soon forced to withdraw due to the approach of a Roman auxiliary force, leaving the army of Vercingetorix besieged by ever-increasing numbers of Roman legionnaires at Alesia.

The final action of the battle would come at a point of desperation for the Celtic Gauls. Surrounded by Caesar's forces and unable to procure fresh supplies, the forces of Vercingetorix were rapidly running out of food, forcing a decision between a final attack or slow starvation. The Gauls identified a weak point in the Roman fortification, where the wall could not be carried through because of a large obstructing hill. An attack mounted on this point by Vercingetorix and his forces was repelled by Caesar's infantry forces combined with a large amount of cavalry that was used to stage fast and mobile attacks on the Celtic warriors. Once the attack had failed, Vercingetorix and what remained of his forces returned to Alesia. The decision to surrender was made shortly afterward, and Vercingetorix, the last of the great Celtic kings to resist Rome in its attempt to seize all of Gaul, voluntarily offered himself up as a captive in order to convince the Romans to accept a peaceful surrender. Vercingetorix would be executed in 46 BCE, when Caesar was awarded a ceremonial triumph in Rome for his campaigns.

Though pockets of resistance remained, the Gallic Wars as a full-scale series of campaigns against large and organized tribal armies effectively ended with the Battle of Alesia. Despite their best efforts, the Celts of

Gaul had failed to defeat the Romans under Caesar. This was, in large part, due to their own internal conflicts and inability to unite as a common resistance force until it was already too late. Caesar and other Roman writers would go on to portray the Gauls and other Celtic peoples as barbarians in their writings, eventually shaping the perception of the Celts throughout much of history. However, the history of the Celtic tribes in Gaul was not yet over. Indeed, they would remain as a major force in Europe throughout most of Roman history.

Unlike the Celts of Britain, the Gallic Celts had already been long exposed to Roman culture, and so did not undergo the sudden and violent culture shock of their more insulated Britannic counterparts. Over time, they would gradually come to adopt many of the customs and cultural traditions of the Romans, while at the same time retaining much of their identity as culturally Celtic peoples. Gaul was also more important to the Roman Empire than was Britain, thanks to its great material prosperity. Even though the Romans gradually transformed Gaul away from its Celtic traditions over the coming centuries, the peoples who lived there were still distinctly of Celtic origin.

Gaul would go on to be a part of a breakaway political entity in the third century CE known as the Gallic Empire. Though still extensively inhabited by Celtic tribes, Gaul by this time had become so Romanized that even the rulers of the Gallic Empire were Romans, albeit Romans who disobeyed the central authority of the city of Rome itself. The Gallic Empire would also, at its territorial height, include Roman Britain, which was still preserving pockets of almost exclusively Celtic culture in its more remote northern areas.

This combined culture formed from elements of both Celtic and Roman traditions, known to modern scholars as Gallo-Roman culture, would continue to dominate Gaul until the 5th century CE, after the fall of the western Roman Empire. During this time period, the Germanic tribes began mass migrations out of Germany and into the rest of Europe, disrupting existing Celtic societies and in many cases largely replacing their populations. This series of Germanic invasions was essentially the end of what remained of Celtic culture in mainland Europe, as the Germanic tribes came in conjunction with the widespread adoption of Christianity throughout much of Europe. With their culture gradually replaced by religious influences from Christianity and the traditions of the Germanic tribes, the peoples inhabiting Gaul became Celtic only in the

sense of having descended from populations that had, in an earlier time, exhibited Celtic culture.

Among the most prominent of the examples of Germanic migration during this period is that of the Franks, the Germanic people who came to control the country that is today France. These Frankish tribes would eventually be brought together to form Frankish Gaul, an empire that stretched across much of the lands formerly described as Gaul by the Romans. This final chapter in the history of Celtic Gaul would occur in the mid 5th century CE, by which time Celtic culture in Europe had already declined massively from its peak. This Frankish kingdom would be ruled by the Merovingian line of kings, considered to be the first royal house of France and the line that bred the famous king Clovis I.

Though Gaul would not preserve Celtic culture as Britain would, its importance as the center of that culture would be difficult to understate. Containing the areas of central Europe where Celtic culture first arose, Gaul acted as the space into which the Celts would spread to create a range of tribal lands that would thrive in the pre-Roman and early Roman eras before being conquered by Julius Caesar in the 1st century BCE. As the main center of the many Celtic tribes, the region that was once known as

Gaul has also produced many of the most significant archaeological finds relating to the Celts, their way of life and the development and spread of their culture. This archaeological significance is complemented by a historical significance as the area where the Celtic groups had the longest and most extensive contact with the ancient Romans and Greeks, producing many opportunities for the historians and geographers of those civilizations to create written accounts of the Celtic peoples. As the source of so much of the knowledge that we in modern times have been able to accumulate about the Celts, Gaul holds a special significance in the study of these great peoples of ancient Europe.

Section Four

The Celts in Iberia

While Britain, France and some parts of central Europe are traditionally thought of as centers of Celtic culture, it is a fact generally not mentioned that the Celts also had an extensive presence in the Iberian peninsula. The early Celtic Hallstatt Culture seems to have occupied areas of the peninsula fairly early on, though there is no precise consensus on exactly

when first Celtic or proto-Celtic cultures made their way westward into the area.

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, the Celts migrated into an area that was already populated by a well-established group of tribes known as the Iberians, who were not of Celtic origin, as well as other pre-Celtic Indo-European speaking groups. This situation was not entirely dissimilar to the case of the Belgic peoples in Gaul, where Germanic tribes migrated into areas that were classically Celtic. The results, too, share interesting parallels. In the case of the Belgic peoples, Germanic and Celtic culture merged into a single hybrid, while in what are today Spain and Portugal, the same phenomenon produced Celtiberian culture, a mixture of languages and traditions from the native Iberians and the migrating or invading Celts. This phenomenon, however, only occurred in some regions where there was a large degree of overlap between Celtic and Iberian populations. In other parts of the peninsula, such as the northwest, Celtic culture remained more or less free of extensive Iberian influence.

At first, the Celts of this region appear to have lived in small, moderately fortified settlements. As time passed, however, the settlements became larger and larger, accommodating larger populations and

becoming more heavily fortified, a common theme throughout the development of most Celtic settlements because of the frequent wars between various tribes. These settlements, which can be dated back as far as the 9th century BCE in some cases (though it is very possible that these early settlements predate truly Celtic culture, which probably arrived in the 7th or even late 8th century BCE during the time of early Hallstat Culture), represent some of the earliest Celtic and proto-Celtic settlements outside of the Celtic homeland of southern Germany. The society that created these early settlements in Iberia has come to be called Castro Culture by modern historians and archaeologists, a name derived from one of the Celtic tribes that was encountered by the Romans in their conquests of Spain, as well as the name that the Romans assigned to their cities.

The Celts of the Castro Culture developed along an interesting arc. Being one of the longest-lived uninterrupted Celtic societies of Europe, Castro Culture reached a very advanced level before finally being conquered by the Romans in the late 1st century BCE. Large and complex settlements in the form of unusually large hill forts and *oppida* in the northwestern regions of Iberia speak to both a high degree of societal organization and a rich material culture. Like many Celtic societies, the people of Castro Culture are known to have been extremely skilled in the metallurgical arts,

as many pieces of fine art, jewelry and well-crafted weapons have been found throughout the region that is traditionally associated with Castro Culture. In many ways, this largely forgotten population of Celts in Iberia rivaled and even surpassed its counterparts in both the rest of continental Europe and Britain. The people of this culture themselves were known to the Romans as the Gallaeci, and the region would go on to become known as Galacia (not to be confused with the very similarly named region of Turkey under Celtic control that was discussed in the section on Gaul).

Illustration 7: Photograph from an original archaeological excavation of a Castro Culture site. Note the round stone foundations, which are what remains of individual Castro houses.

Though Castro Culture was probably the most influential of the Celtic societies of

Iberia, it did not cover a large extent of the peninsula. Indeed, Castro Culture flourished primarily in the northwestern extreme of Iberia. However, the peoples that made up Castro Culture were not the only Celts that made the regions that are today Spain and Portugal their home. Celtic populations throughout the central Iberian peninsula were also quite common. These Celtic populations can be traced to the 6th century BCE in their earliest origins and were fairly representative of European Hallstat culture. In later centuries, however, a shift would begin to occur in some of the Celtic groups. Contact with the Iberians, who primarily inhabited the southeastern regions of the peninsula, would result in the hybrid Celtiberian language and culture. It is theorized that this shift occurred over a long period of time and that multiple Celtic migrations took place into the lands surrounding Iberian territory. Certainly by the 3rd century BCE, however, the Celtiberian culture had taken on its own distinct and unique characteristics that made it not quite like any other population in Europe at the time.

Though the tribal populations of Iberia do not find themselves prominently mentioned in written histories until later in the Roman era, the history of the Iberian peninsula prior to the Roman conquest is fairly clear. The Celts, Iberians and native pre-Celtic Indo-Europeans were not

the only populations that existed there. Southern Iberia and portions of the west had long been a place known to the ancient Phoenicians, a seafaring people of the Near East who established trade routes across almost all of the Mediterranean basin. By the late 8th or early 7th century, coastal settlements had been established to facilitate this trade, and it very likely that the Phoenicians and the Celtic tribes would go on to do extensive trading business together. We may be sure that the native Iberians were certainly in contact with these ancient traders, as the written Iberian language uses an alphabet that seems to be based on the Phoenician writing system. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Celtic tribes, too, would have made contact with the Phoenicians, especially given the richness of the mineral resources that were to be found in parts of the peninsula that were primarily Celtic.

The next phase of Iberian history would see involvement from one of Rome's greatest enemies in its early years, Carthage. Following the end of the First Punic War in 241 BCE, large parts of Iberia would become an unofficial Carthaginian province, allowing the Carthaginians to leverage the peninsula's extensive natural resources for its continued efforts to defeat Rome. This situation is what first brought the Celtic populations of Iberia into conflict with Rome, as the Carthaginians were quick to

recognize the value of the Celtic warriors as mercenaries. Unfortunately for the Celts, this would bring them into a series of conflicts with Rome that would last for nearly two centuries and result in the Romanization of the Celtic societies of Iberia.

Of the early Celtic tribes to have pursued efforts against Rome, the most notable are almost certainly the tribal confederation known as the Cantabri, an extremely warlike group from the far north of Spain, along the Atlantic coastline. The Cantabri would ally with the Carthaginians for a time, serving as highly effective mercenaries in the armies sent to do battle with Rome in the later 3rd century BCE. Other tribes, too, would find their place in the armies of Carthage, but the Cantabri were frequently described as the most warlike of the Celtic tribes.

Soon, however, the conflict between Rome and the Iberian Celts would become more direct as Roman armies began a series of wars in the peninsula intended to drive the Carthaginians out and to establish rule over the Celtic tribes there. Spain, in technicality, had been claimed by the Romans in 206 BCE, when a defeat of the Carthaginians in Spain during the Second Punic War had driven out their principle military enemy there. However, the Celtic tribes were far from entirely subjugated by the

Carthaginian loss, and would continue to fight the Romans for the lands that they controlled. The first major campaign targeting the Celtic tribes in Iberia would be that of the Roman soldier, statesman and historian Cato the Elder, who launched an attack on the eastern parts of Iberia in 195 BCE. Though these campaigns would primarily involve more purely Iberian regions, the nearby Celtiberian tribes would also be attacked. This campaign, which ended in victory for Rome, would set the stage for a series of three wars with the Celtiberian tribes that, for obvious reasons, have come to be known as the Celtiberian Wars.

The First Celtiberian War began in 181 BCE when an uprising occurred among the Celtiberian tribes that had suffered defeat and subjugation at the hands of the Romans during Cato's campaign more than a decade earlier. This war, however, would be quite limited in scope, lasting for only two years and resulting in the reestablishment of Roman control over the areas that were in rebellion. It was, however, a foreshadowing of the next two centuries for the Romans, who would have to endure frequent rebellions and wars with the Celtic tribes before their conquest of Iberia would be complete.

The next phase of the Celtiberian Wars was the Second Celtiberian War, which would begin in 154 BCE. Much like the First Celtiberian War, this war would be a series of engagements between the Romans and rebelling Celtiberian tribes still attempting to seize back the lands that had been essentially taken from them by the invading Romans. This time, however, the Celts would be much more successful in their efforts against Rome. This was partially due to a coincidence of time, as the Lusitani, one of the pre-Celtic tribes native to western Iberia, had also begun an uprising at almost exactly the same time as the Celtiberians, leaving the Romans engaged in multiple sections of the hostile peninsula. Indeed, in one instance, 6,000 Roman legionnaires were ambushed and killed in a single battle with the Celtiberian rebels. Eventually, despite the immense amount of bloodshed that would occur between the two over the course of three years, the Celtiberian tribes signed a peace treaty with Rome in 151 BCE. Though this largely ended the war, scattered groups of rebels continued to maintain a low-level insurgency in Celtiberian lands through most of the short time that the treaty held.

The breaking of the treaty in 143 BCE would ignite the Third Celtiberian War, often better known as the Numantine War. The breaking of the treaty came at the urging of Viriatus, the leader of the Lusitanians who had, at

that point, been recently defeated by Rome. The Celtiberian tribes, however, seem to have been more than willing to once again begin an uprising against Rome, which was still seen as a common enemy both among the various Celtic tribes and between the Celtic and non-Celtic peoples of Iberia. Unlike the previous two wars, the Third Celtiberian War would last for nearly a decade and would end in a decisive victory for Rome that would permanently make the Celtiberian lands part of the Roman Empire.

This last of the Celtiberian Wars takes its more common name from Numantia, one of the major Celtiberian *oppida* that acted as a center of resistance to the Romans. Numantia had also been one of the major contributors on the Celtiberian side in the Second Celtiberian War. In the last phase of the war, Numantia and its people took the lead against the Romans, scoring several important victories in the field that cost the Romans dearly in the lives of their troops. Particularly devastating for Rome was the surrender of 20,000 Roman troops to the Numantians in 137 BCE. Interestingly enough, this surrender was almost entirely the result of bad intelligence on the part of the Roman commander, Hostilius Mancinus. While attempting to take Numantia, Mancinus was informed (incorrectly) that a Celtiberian relief force was being sent to aid the

Numantians. Concerned about being caught between the city's defenses and a Celtiberian force of unknown size, Mancinus surrendered his army despite his more than 3 to 1 numerical superiority and signed a treaty of peace with the Celtiberians. The treaty, however, would not be recognized by the Roman Senate. As such, a brief cessation of hostilities occurred when Mancinus was recalled to Rome, but the war would soon resume under his immediate successor.

Illustration 8: Some of the ruins of the Celtic city of Numantia.

The war would continue on until 134 BCE, when a Roman force laid a final siege to Numantia. The war, which had by this time carried on for 10 years, had been so costly to Rome in both troops and resources that the

Romans had resolved to end the conflict once and for all. In order to ensure success, 30,000 legionnaires and many thousands more allied troops were dispatched under the command of Scipio Aemilianus to defeat the Celtiberian tribes and to take Numantia. Aemilianus, however, would employ a different strategy than the commanders who had fought the Celtiberians before, and one that reveals how effective the Celtic armies of Iberia were in the field. Rather than meeting his enemies in an open engagement, Aemilianus destroyed the crops throughout the lands around Numantia, leaving his enemies faced with starvation in the city of the impending threat of a Roman army outside of its gates. The siege lasted for more than eight months, eventually resulting in the surrender of Numantia and, with it, the ending of most of the organized Celtiberian rebellion, in 133 BCE.

Though the ending of the Celtiberian Wars resulted in almost complete Roman control over the lands held by the hybrid Celtic and Iberian tribes of Spain, the subjugation of the Celts in the peninsula was far from complete. Much resistance would still meet the Romans over the next century, and the possibility for Celtic uprisings, much like in Gaul and in Britain, was a nearly constant threat to Roman power. However, with the Celtiberian Wars over, the process of the Romanization of the Iberian

Peninsula became an inevitability. Only in the north and northwest of Iberia did the free Celtic peoples maintain their independence, and it was here that the Romans would face perhaps the strongest opposition from the Celts.

It is a striking commentary on the militaristic skill of the Celts of northern and northwestern Iberia that it would be more than a century after the end of the Celtiberian Wars in 133 BCE that Rome would finally launch an assault to finish its conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. Standing in opposition to them were the Gallaecians (the peoples who made up Castro Culture), another Celtic group known as the Astures who are believed to have migrated into northern Spain in the 6th century BCE and the warlike Cantabri. The conflict that would see the last stand of the Celtic peoples of Iberia against the powerful Roman Empire would draw its name from the latter of these and would come to be called the Cantabrian War.

The Cantabrian War began in either 29 or 28 BCE, during the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus, who personally led much of the campaign. At first, the primary target of the incursion was the Cantabri tribal confederation itself, which had a long history of conflict with Rome.

However, with the Roman legions arrived in northern Spain with nearly 50,000 soldiers, the imminent threat caused the three remaining independent tribal groups to band together, likely realizing that no individual Celtic force would have a reasonable chance of defeating the Roman army.

Sadly, a less than satisfying military history of the Cantabrian War has survived, with only certain bits and pieces having been recorded for posterity. It is possible that the leader of the Cantabri tribe during this time was a man by the name of Corocotta, who rates only the briefest of mentions in Roman writings as a leader of raids on Roman settlements in northern Iberia. Whether or not Corocotta was the king of the Cantabri or just a bandit leader, it is almost certain that this type of raiding was part of the reason for the final decision of Rome to invade Cantabri territory. Some tactical details have also survived, particularly several accounts which seem to indicate that the Cantabri and their allies preferred guerrilla warfare to open engagements. This strategy was likely a very effective one against the Romans, who were in remote, unfamiliar and mountainous territory fighting enemies that knew the lay of the land and were able to use it to their advantage.

This type of slow guerrilla war may have succeeded in driving the Romans out but for a fatal blunder on the part of the Celts. During the campaign, Augustus retired from the front lines, likely due to an illness. Encouraged by the development, the Celtic allied forces are said to have engaged the Roman army in a general battle, a devastating tactical error against an enemy that specialized in such warfare but which was quite vulnerable to the type of guerrilla warfare the Cantabri had waged up to this point. Few details of the battle that ensued are known, but the Roman writer Cassius Dio records that the battle was a victory for the Romans, who were finally able to engage in their preferred method of combat with the Celtic tribes.

During the conflict, the Cantabri in particular became famous for committing ritualistic suicide rather than allowing themselves to be captured and enslaved, as would have almost certainly been there fate at the hands of the Romans. This trait, it seems, was unique to the Cantabri and was not shared by their Asture comrades. In particular, a form of self-poisoning using a preparation made from the seeds of yew trees rates a prominent mention in Roman accounts. Whether or not these accounts are historically accurate will likely never be known for sure, but modern science has identified a toxic chemical known today as taxine that gives

the yew plant its poisonous attributes and which is to be found in the highest concentrations in its seeds.

The role of the Gallaecians in the Cantabrian War is a matter which is quite unclear. It is known that, following the war, the region of northwestern Spain that is associated with the Gallaeci and their unique Castro Culture fell into Roman hands and began a long and gradual process or Romanization. This makes it extremely likely that they formed a part of the Celtic alliance led by the warlike Cantabri. However, almost no details about their independent actions as a tribe during this conflict have survived. This may well be due to the fact that Roman writers often grouped multiple tribes together, especially when dealing with tribal confederations such as the Cantabri (which were made up of a group of very closely related but still separate tribes). It is therefore possible that the Gallaeci were simply lumped in with the Cantabri and that their individual contributions to the war were not recorded as a separate matter of history.

After the defeat at the general engagement following the withdrawal of Augustus, the Cantabri and their Celtic allies continued to fight the Romans until 19 BCE, when victory was formally declared by Rome. This,

however, was not the end of Cantabri opposition to Rome. Throughout the next 40 years, Cantabri rebellions would be common. Owing to the remoteness of certain areas under Cantabri control, Rome never truly gained complete dominion over them, and would eventually even do as its Carthaginian predecessors in Spain had done long ago and make use of the military skills of the Cantabri by hiring them as mercenaries.

Following the end of the Cantabrian War, the areas of northern and northwestern Spain began to adopt Roman culture to varying degrees. The Gallaeci adopted Roman culture quite thoroughly, bringing an end to the purely Celtic Castro Culture that had endured since the settlement of northwestern Iberia by Celtic or proto-Celtic peoples centuries earlier. The Cantabri, in contrast, found themselves resisting the cultural pressure of Rome, deciding instead to maintain a more intact Celtic cultural tradition. Overall, however, these regions of the Iberian peninsula fared far better in retaining much of the Celtic character than many of the continental areas that had been conquered by Rome.

Unlike in Gaul, Celtic culture in Iberia would not only hold out, but would even have a brief Renaissance after the fall of the Roman Empire. While the Gallaeci largely disappeared into the homogeneous Roman-

influenced populations of Spain that were prevalent in the early Middle Ages, the Cantabri and, to a lesser extent, the Astures briefly regained both political independence and and ability to freely express a culture that was still mostly Celtic in nature. This state of affairs, however, would be very short-lived, as Germanic tribes moving westward across Europe would soon reach the Iberian peninsula and drive what few Celtic cultures still existed in the area almost completely extinct. The Cantabri, holding out in their mountainous lands in northern Spain, were probably the last example of Celtic culture in continental Europe, as some have suggested that some regions of the former Cantabri lands may have still been practicing a largely Celtic culture as late as the 7th century CE, by which time only the Celts of Britain would still have been extant.

Though often forgotten, the arc of Celtic history in Iberia is incredibly important in the context of overall Celtic history. Having begun early on with Hallstat migrations and surviving well through the end of the Roman Empire, Celtic Iberia was one of the most enduring examples of Celtic culture in Europe. Castro Culture, in particular, also shows the very high level of societal advancement that the Celtic tribes could reach, further dispelling the myth that the Celts were little more than warlike barbarians.

Section Five

Celtic Religion

One of the most important aspects of Celtic cultures is the polytheistic religious tradition that was practiced throughout the various groups of Celts. Unlike many religions, the worship system of the Celts has not left behind formal prayers or scriptures in written form. Some indigenous Celtic records have survived to the modern era, but even most of these were written by authors who were of Celtic descent in Ireland during the Middle Ages, by which time native Celtic religion had already given way to Christianity. Archaeological finds, however, combined with what written material there is, have allowed modern scholars to piece together a reasonably good, if only general and certainly incomplete, understanding of the Celtic faith.

The nature of Celtic religion seems to have been a faith that acknowledged a large pantheon of gods (varying by the location and tribe), as well as several lesser gods, sometimes described as spirits, that represented certain natural things and places. In this sense, the Celts were both polytheistic and animistic, a combination that probably drew on much more ancient European religious traditions that predate written source material in Europe. This dichotomy within the religion seems to have developed as a result of contact with the Greeks and Romans, who envisioned their gods as human-like beings, rather than as abstract spirits. Over time, the worship of gods as entities with very human characteristics seems to have become more and more common, eventually supplanting the earlier animistic tradition altogether. Individual local and tribal gods also found their place in this complex pantheon, a phenomenon that is to be expected given the fact that the Celtic tribes were far from being a single unified group of peoples.

Among the most common themes in representations of Celtic deities is a figure that is sometimes referred to simply as the horned or antlered god. This figure appears in many pieces of Celtic artwork, most notably on an artifact known as the Gundestrup Cauldron, which will be discussed in more detail in the section dealing with archaeology. Another artifact,

called the Pillar of the Boatmen, bears a Latin inscription that identifies this god as Cernunnos, though it is unclear whether or not this name was more or less universal for the god across the tribes or if different tribes had different variants of him. Cernunnos is almost always depicted alongside images of various animals. This style of depiction, combined with his horns or antlers, has led some modern scholars to conclude that he was likely a major nature god common to the Celtic peoples. However, no written accounts concerning his exact role in the Celtic pantheon have survived to the modern era, so this must be treated as informed speculation, rather than as empirical fact.

Illustration 9: Cernunnos as depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron.

Another god thought to have been widely worshiped in the Celtic world is Teutates, a god believed to have taken on a role as a defender of the tribes. Because of the importance of the tribal unit in the societal structure of the Celts, such a god would have been seen as playing a critical role in Celtic religion. His importance is perhaps best evidenced by the fact that, in the 1st century CE, the Roman writer Lucan chose Teutates as one of only three Celtic gods mentioned in a brief section of one of his works describing the Celts. The other two of these three critical gods were Esus, who may have been a god of woods, forest and plants, and Taranis, probably a god of strength or war.

In Ireland, Wales and Iberia, the Celtic tribes seem to have different gods than their counterparts in the tribes of the Britons and Gauls. Ireland's Celtic gods, in particular, have survived as a type of Irish folklore mythology that continued to exist within the context of Christian Ireland in the Middle Ages. The literature regarding these gods was written by the Middle Age Christians, but still conveys most of the major aspects of some of these gods and goddesses. Some notable examples from this Irish pantheon are Morrigan, a goddess associated with fate and foretelling, Ler, the god of the sea and Neit, who was the god of war. Most of the deities written about by Welsh authors are in some way related to these Irish

figures, as both shared common ancestry in the ancient Celtic religious traditions.

Much as in any ancient religious system, the Celtic religion featured a priestly class of men who were not only the religious authorities, but also played a role in the political life of the tribes. In the Roman accounts, these priests are known as Druids, though it should be noted that this term is applied only to the priests in Britain and Gaul. However, it is very likely that a rough counterpart to the Druids existed in most if not all Celtic tribal societies. Historically speaking, the Druids are something of an enigma due to there being no known contemporary sources regarding them that were not of Roman or Greek origin. As such, little to nothing is known of their actual practices in ancient times, but a relatively good model of their role in Celtic societies has been created by modern and historic scholars.

In most Celtic cultures, the Druidic priests seem to have had a role as elders and wise men in matters that went far beyond the religious. Caesar, for example, includes in his history of the Gallic Wars that the Druids in Gaul took on the role of judges in their tribes, It is unclear, however, just how well Caesar reported on the activities and the nature of the Druids, as

many of his societal notes on Celtic culture have been criticized as inaccurate, possibly due to his wish to portray the Celts as barbarians.

Illustration 10: Artistic rendering of a Druidic priest addressing a Celtic tribe.

Almost all accounts of the Druids portray them as a learned class, with some ancient writers going so far as to label them as philosophers, a notion that stands in stark contrast to the idea of the Celtic peoples as a whole as primitives. The Druids are believed to have passed on their

knowledge, both in religious and non-religious matters, through a complex oral tradition that would keep their wisdom carefully controlled. Caesar describes this oral tradition as a series of formal verses that would have to be learned by a Druidic priest in training over a long period of time. Whether or not this training was truly secretive is a matter of some debate, as some writers suggest that only the Druids were privy to their knowledge, whereas others describe them lecturing readily on at least some portions of their wisdom. It is possible that both of these viewpoints could be explained by different levels of secrecy being attached to different types of Druidic knowledge (religious rituals being more closely guarded than knowledge about medicine, for example). However, as nothing of this oral tradition has survived into the modern era, any conclusions drawn about it must be labeled as speculation.

In all of the source material from ancient times that has survived, only one Druid is identified by name. This man, by the name of Diviciacus, was a contemporary of Julius Caesar and a leader of the Aedui, a Celtic tribe in Gaul that was generally pro-Roman. The Roman writer and orator Cicero, in his work *De Divinatione* (On Divination), mentions this same Diviciacus and names his specifically as a Druid. Cicero claims to have known Diviciacus personally and to have hosted him at his own home

during a visit that he (Diviciacus) made to Rome. As such, what little Cicero wrote about this one Celtic priest may be the closest thing to a firsthand account of the Druids, their knowledge and their practices that has survived into the modern era. Owing to the subject of the work, Cicero largely restricts his exploration of the Druids to their supposed skills as diviners. In this area, Cicero makes a notable mention of the practice of augury, or the divining of the future by means of reading various kinds of omens.

Another account of Druidic practices is somewhat better-known, but is not from such a first-hand source. This account, appearing in the work of Pliny the Elder, specifically addresses an individual Druidic ceremony. If it is accurate, this ceremony is the only piece of the ritual practices of the Druids that is known today in any detail. Pliny states that this ritual centered around the harvesting of mistletoe, which he notes as sacred to the Druids, especially when found growing on an oak tree. The harvesting of this plant was done with a ritual feast and a sacrifice of two bulls, according to Pliny. The account also suggests special tools and garments used for the occasion, specifically a sickle made of gold and white robes. Pliny states that mistletoe was viewed as a powerful medicine by the Druids, who used it as an antidote to various poisons. If the account is

accurate, it may reflect a knowledge of medicinal herbs on the part of the Druidic priests.

The Druids would lose much of their power in Celtic society during the Roman era. Over the time that the Romans ruled Gaul and Britain, the Druids would be systematically outlawed, with the emperor Tiberius finally going so far as to ban almost all indigenous Celtic religious officials, even including those who were primarily concerned with the healing arts. There are several possible motivations for the Roman banishment of the Druids. The first, and probably most likely, was that the Druids were held in such high esteem in most Celtic tribes that they could have posed a serious political threat to the Romans if they had ever called for unified Celtic resistance. Another interpretation endorsed by some ancient writers is the idea that the Druids and other native Celtic religious practitioners were banned because of practices of human sacrifice that may have existed in Celtic societies before the coming of the Romans.

Precisely what role human sacrifice may have played in Celtic religious practices is not currently known. Roman writers frequently noted that human sacrifices did occur, and in Caesar's accounts, such sacrifices were in fact presided over by Druidic priests. Indeed, it was in Caesar's writings

that the concept of the Wicker Man, a large wooden effigy into which a sacrifice would be placed to be burnt alive, was introduced. However, given the lack of objectivity that most Roman writers had with regards to the Celts, these accounts should be treated as somewhat questionable.

Some archaeological findings, however, do seem to provide at least circumstantial evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in Celtic culture. In Ireland, for example, the recent find of a pre-Celtic bog body (a human body preserved by the acidic conditions in a peat bog) has more or less proven that the Irish, in very ancient times, did practice ritual sacrifice. This 2011 find, which has come to be called Cashel Man, would have little bearing on the question of Celtic ritual sacrifice were it not for similarities exhibited between this body and another one, called Old Croghan Man, found in Ireland in 2003. Old Croghan Man shows similar wounds to Cashel Man, both of which are heavily indicative of ritual murder, mutilation and perhaps even torture. Some researchers have theorized that these bodies may have once been tribal kings put to death for poor conditions under their reign, perhaps even as part of a ritual of initiation for a new king. If Old Croghan Man truly was killed in such a way, it would effectively prove that human sacrifices did occur in at least

some Celtic societies, as his body has been dated to between the 4th and 2nd centuries BCE, during the height of Celtic culture in Europe.

Another component of Celtic religious practice in some places were poets who orally transferred the mythologies of their people through recited verse. These learned poets were mostly a product of Wales and Ireland. Though not priests, *per se*, these learned poets appear to have served the important function of perpetuating Celtic religious traditions, a function that would continue long after even the Christianization of Britain. In Ireland, of poets known as Fili, were somewhat analogous to the Druids in other parts of the Celtic world, acting as judges, wise men, preservers of knowledge and even healers. In Wales, the poets who kept and passed on the indigenous traditions were known as Bards. Some of these poets would keep their traditions alive, allowing them to be copied down in the Middle Ages. This is one of the primary reasons that Irish and Welsh pre-Christian traditions have survived for modern study, while so many others practiced by the Celts have not.

The Romans, in many ways, had a profound impact on Celtic religion. Roman religious traditions, though not strictly imposed on conquered peoples, would heavily influence Celtic theology. Some deities would even

gradually come to be identified as merely Celtic versions of Roman gods, and thus would take on attributes of those Roman gods. The best example of this gradual influence of Roman religion on the Celtic pantheon is the god Taranis. Over time, Taranis, a fully Celtic deity, took on more and more attributes of the Roman god Jupiter, until representations of Taranis became virtually indistinguishable form those of his Roman counterpart. Even the Romans, upon first encountering Celtic religion, attempted to frame its gods as equivalents of their own pantheon.

Sadly, Celtic religion is a topic about which there will likely never be sufficient data to make absolute conclusions. If the accounts of the amount of training that Druidic priests went through are accurate, we may reasonably infer that the religion was a fairly complex one, likely centering on many specific rituals for individual gods. Because very little of the oral tradition that originally conveyed the finer points of Celtic religious practices has survived, it is very likely that the topic will remain permanently enigmatic.

Section Six

Life in a Celtic Society

As has been stated repeatedly up to this point, the Celts were not a single people, but rather a group of peoples with similar languages and cultures. As such, there is no single description that can truly characterize all of the Celts. In their daily lives, however, most Celtic societies shared many commonalities in their ways of living. This section will briefly explore some of these common elements in an attempt to convey the way of life of the everyday people of Celtic tribes.

Most Celtic groups lived in small farming communities, with some sites estimated to have accommodated as few as 50 permanent residents. Though small, these settlements were a very basic unit of Celtic society, as it was in such environments that many individual Celts would be born, live their lives, raise a new generation and eventually die. House types in these small villages varied slightly from region to region, but one of the most well-known construction types, especially in Celtic Britain, was the roundhouse. Roundhouses, as one might expect, are circular structures created by building a base of wooden posts around which mud and soil would be packed in to form walls. Atop this basic structure, a thatched roof would be built that would come to a point at its highest level, giving

the home a conical appearance. These roundhouses can also be found even in fairly large settlements in Britain.

Illustration 11: A modern reconstuction of a Celtic village.

With regards to larger settlements, the Roman descriptions of the Celts as barbarians have led to a popular perception of the Celts as people who lived only in the aforementioned small communities. However, even in Roman literature, it is widely acknowledged that Celtic tribes did inhabit much larger towns in some areas. Fortified settlements built on top of hills seem to have become relatively common by the middle Iron Age. These settlements, though still not on par with the great cities in other parts of the ancient world, could house several hundred or in some cases over one

thousand citizens, making them far larger than the decentralized farming communities that made up much of the Celtic world. There was, however, one more stage of Celtic settlement that would dwarf these forts.

Beginning in the 2nd century BCE, a new kind of settlement, which the Romans called *oppida,* came into usage throughout much of Europe and Britain. These structures seem to have evolved from the smaller hill forts that had been common in earlier centuries, and usually featured extensive fortifications, held large populations (several thousand) and were important as regional centers of political power. The *oppida* may show that, even on the threshold of Roman conquest, Celtic culture was still in the process of advancing in its own right.

By the time of the Celts, agriculture had long been in use throughout Europe, and was the primary occupation of most of the population of the various Celtic tribes. In Britain, traces have remained of Celtic fields, which were carefully planned and laid out so as to make optimal usage of the land, as opposed to simply planting crops on any piece of land that was convenient. Domestic animals were also commonly kept in enclosures of various sizes. In later years just prior to the Roman conquests, the Celts seem to have begun a systematic deforestation of many of their lands, a

trend that could continue through the Roman era and the Middle Ages as populations grew, requiring both more arable land for food production and more wood for the building of homes.

Much like any culture that reaches a certain degree of advancement, Celtic societies exhibited a degree of social stratification between the various classes of people that made them up. Many of these classes, such as kings, Druids and poets, have already been discussed. However, there were also nobles, who were generally related to the kings, professional soldiers and an artisan class made up of those with specialized and useful skills, such as metalworking and masonry. Unlike in many ancient cultures, however, there was a relatively high degree of social mobility within these classes in the sense that one's birth did not inherently determine one's social status and that there was frequently overlap between the classes (a professional soldier also having a career as an artisan, for example). Below these higher classes was the agricultural peasant class, made up of free Celts with full rights in Celtic society. These agricultural workers rarely became as wealthy as their higher-class counterparts, but were the backbone of Celtic society.

Finally, a class of slaves may or may not have existed. Some Roman writers record slavery as being prevalent among the Celtic tribes. While Roman accounts are not always accurate because of their attempts to portray the Celts in a negative light, there is no particular reason to assume that the Romans, themselves a people that commonly owned slaves, would have inserted a false account of slavery into writings of the Celts, as there would have been little to no perception of the institution as immoral in the context of Roman society. One Roman writer specifically notes that slavery, even if it did exist in Gaul, did not occur among the Celts of Britain. One distinct possibility is that the Celts did not engage in slavery as a widespread practice, but that the common wars between the tribes produced captives of war, who were then enslaved as enemies of the victorious tribe.

Women in Celtic society, much like women in most ancient cultures, found themselves as slightly inferior in social status to their male counterparts. However, there is much evidence to suggest that Celtic women were treated more or less equally, and certainly with more fairness than in some of the more entirely patriarchal societies of the ancient world. Some women, most notably Boudicca, found themselves holding positions of extreme political prominence within their own tribes.

However, this is generally considered to have been an exception, rather than the rule for Celtic women. In legal matters, women were generally treated as having roughly equal right to men, though they did have fewer opportunities to inherit property in their own right than did their male relatives.

Celtic women were portrayed by the Romans as warriors in their own right, though there is some question as to how often Celtic women actually engaged in battle. It is generally believed that women in Celtic societies could both own property and even have an occupation or trade, a genuine rarity in the ancient world. Perhaps most telling of all with regards to the attitudes of the Celts toward women is the fact that females were allowed to join the ranks of the Druids, the most respected of all societal classes.

Section Seven

Celtic Military Traditions

Though the Romans did eventually conquer them, even the most anti-Celtic writers in Roman history would acknowledge the Celts as masters

of warfare and as brave fighters. Though neither as organized nor as well equipped as the legions of Rome, Celtic armies were a force to be reckoned with in the field, as demonstrated by the extent of the forces that Julius Caesar had to bring to bear against them and the sheer amount of effort and resources that went into the Roman conquests of Gaul and Britain.

The Celts, thanks to their frequent internal tribal warfare, had developed martial traditions long before they engaged in combat with Rome. Indeed, archaeological finds from the Hallstat Culture period show that most of the military technologies associated with the Celts were more or less fully developed at a fairly early time in Celtic history. Some technologies, however, would continue to develop into the La Tene period. Among these, the most notable example is the longsword that is thought to have been the primary weapon of the Celtic warrior. These longswords were designed almost exclusively for wide slashing motions, which could be devastating with a sufficiently long sword wielded by an experienced fighter. This put the primary sword of the Celts in a position of stark contrast to one of its more frequent opponents, the Roman gladius. The legionnaires of Rome were equipped with these much shorter swords, which were designed for more precise thrusting motions.

Certain Roman accounts mention Celtic warriors going into battle nearly or even completely naked. To military historians, these accounts have long been a matter of debate. Certainly, it could be argued that these records were merely an attempt on the part of the Romans to portray the Celts as barbaric. However, there are certain problems with this theory. The first is that even in the accounts that mention nudity in battle, it is clearly stated that some Celtic warriors did wear armor, whereas others chose to fight without it. This, combined with the fact that a decision to fight without clothing or armor would have been seen as indicative of bravery in the ancient world, seems to rule out the concept that these accounts are mere propaganda. Archaeological finds of well-crafted armor at Celtic sites confirm that the Celts were not without the ability to protect themselves in battle with armor and shields. If some Celtic warriors did choose to fight nude, there are two primary explanations that could justify this decision from a standpoint of military practicality. The first is simply that a soldier fighting without bulky armor gains an increase in both mobility and speed over a heavily armored opponent, such as a Roman legionnaire. The other possibility is that the Celts who fought in this manner were engaging in a type of psychological warfare, attempting to shake the Romans with an overt display of physical courage. Whatever the case may have been, it is

likely that we will never know the exact reasoning behind this tactic or how common it really was in battle.

Though the Celts fought mainly with infantry, cavalry forces were used by many of the tribes. In most cases, these cavalry forces were most likely made up simply of horse-mounted infantrymen. Many Celtic archaeological sites, however, have yielded remains of chariots, which would have been more effective in most battles and would also have required somewhat more skilled handling to use to their fullest advantage. Roman accounts indicate an intriguing tactic employed by the Celts in their chariot warfare of using chariots to deposit soldiers riding on board into enemy ranks. Though such use of chariots was not unheard of in the ancient world, it was much more standard for soldiers to remain on board the chariot while the charioteer drove it through the enemy ranks, rather than jumping off to engage on the ground.

In many cases, warfare would become the occupation of entire tribes for periods of time. In these instances, the tribes would actually find themselves moving with their armies, as in the case of Boudicca's army or the Helvetii of Gaul, both of which moved with far larger numbers of non-combatants than actual warriors. For this reason, large numbers of four-

wheeled wagons would often be brought along on campaigns, as sufficient food to sustain both the army and non-combatant population would be required. This practice proved to be detrimental to Celtic armies in many instances, particularly in their fights against the Romans. Celtic armies, when burdened with thousands of people who were not warriors, often could not move as quickly as the highly trained Roman legions. As can be seen in the case of the Battle of Watling Street, this massive group of non-military personnel could also restrict the movements of the Celts on an active battlefield.

We know relatively little about Celtic battlefield tactics. While individual accounts of battles recorded by the Romans exist and are even fairly thorough, they have two notable weaknesses. The first is that the Romans seem to have constantly sought to make the Celtic tribes out as barbarians. In military matters, they did this by portraying Celtic armies as more or less disorganized hordes of soldiers, rather than cohesive militaries. However, there is much doubt about whether or not this is accurate. Even Roman accounts acknowledge the Celts using complex tactics, such as the plan of separating legions by attacking the baggage train in the middle of Caesar's column at the Battle of the Sabis. This, combined with the fact the Celts engaged in frequent warfare and therefore

would have had ample opportunity to develop effective battlefield tactics, calls the Roman accounts of disorganized hordes into question. Lending further weight to the argument that the Romans embellished battle accounts to make the Celts seem like a more primitive people is the fact that Celtic tribes had invaded both Italy and Greece long before Caesar invaded Gaul and Britain and had fought relatively successfully in both theaters of combat. It is difficult to believe that, no matter how brave Celtic warriors may have been, the armies of these tribes could have fought peoples with such illustrious military traditions without having developed complex and cohesive military strategies and tactics of their own.

In Celtic defensive actions, fortifications were always an important element. Not having the same heavy shields and armor as the Romans equipped their legions with, the Celts would have had a very difficult time creating a defensive line on an open battlefield that could effectively stand against the Romans. Celtic hill forts and the larger *oppida*, therefore, took on a special significance in places the Celts wished to defend. Under most circumstances, however, Celtic armies seem to have preferred offensive campaigns, resorting to defensive positions only when no other option readily presented itself.

A common custom among Celtic tribes, according to Roman sources, was to cut off the heads of fallen enemies for display in their own communities. Celtic religious custom seems to have held that the head was the part of the body that housed the soul or spirit, meaning that ritual decapitation allowed the Celts to bring the spirits of their foes back with them as captives. An account left to us by Diodorus Siculus indicates that, when a battle was finished, a victorious Celtic army would decapitate the bodies of its enemies and hang them around the necks of horses for the journey back to their settlement. Unlike most of the more barbaric practices of the Celts that are mentioned by the Romans, there is significant archaeological evidence to suggest that headhunting was a real custom of the Celtic tribes, and Roman accounts are corroborated by Greek writers, who were generally less biased against the Celts.

Section Eight

Celtic Art

By far the most distinct and recognizable element of the enigmatic Celtic culture is its artwork. Celtic art has long been regarded as some of the finest of ancient Europe, and imitations of its style have been popular throughout much of human history. Because we are here mostly concerned with the nature of purely Celtic culture, we will restrict ourselves in this discussion of art mostly to the Hallstat and La Tene culture artwork that predates Roman influence over the artwork of the Celtic peoples.

At its core, Celtic artwork is a system of ornamentation mostly based around geometric patterns. Representations of human and animal figures were less common during the period prior to extensive Roman contact, but can still be found in several instances. Intriguingly, many everyday objects have been found with fine and entirely unnecessary geometric decoration. This has led some scholars to believe that there may have been some special significance to ornamentation in Celtic culture beyond simply being aesthetically pleasing, as there would be no other reason to decorate what are otherwise utilitarian objects.

Over the arc of Celtic history, the geometric patterns that made up Celtic artistic styles grew gradually more complex, eventually developing into rich and intricate patterns that are today though of as typical of high Celtic

art. This style, aside from defining Celtic artwork throughout most of Celtic history, would also have a profound influence on artistic styles in Wales and particularly in Ireland throughout the Middle Ages and even into the modern era. Among the most frequently seen patterns in Celtic art are spiraling patterns and floral or leaf-shaped patterns, which are often found placed onto everyday objects as decoration.

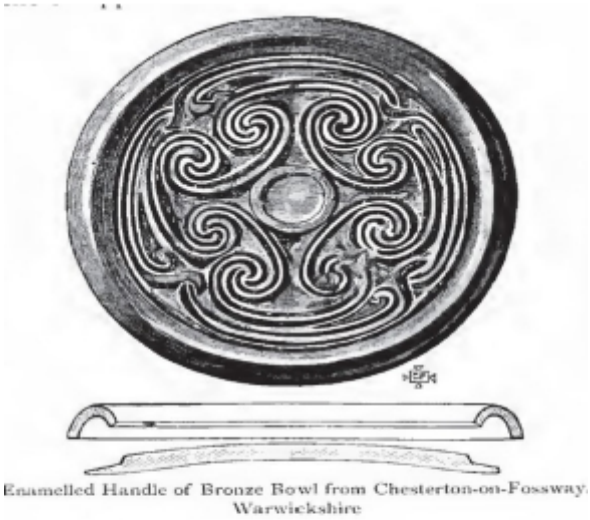

Illustration 12: Illustration of a Celtic bowl showing the typical spiraling geometric patterns of Celtic art.

The Celts, though they were seen by the Romans as a group of primitive barbarians, had a remarkable level of skill in crafting finely decorated items, especially when it came to the working of metal. Bracelets, brooches, decorative helmets and shields and even plates, cups and bowls

made from gold, bronze and silver are associated with finds throughout the Celtic world. This makes the Celts an interesting analog to the Viking tribes of later times, which have come to be viewed as extremely barbarous, but who were arguably the finest silver smiths in Europe in the Middle Ages.

It is widely believed that the Celts drew artistic influence from the 3,000 years of European prehistory that had preceded them. For example, spiral patterns that can be found on stones outside of the Newgrange passage tomb in Ireland bear a striking resemblance to patterns that would feature prominently in Celtic artistic styles, even though Newgrange was built sometime between 2,500 and 3,000 BCE. In these contexts, it is important to note that the influences on Celtic art would vary from region to region, and even the more universal Celtic style would be different in places with different cultural backgrounds.

After having made cultural contact with ancient Greece, the Celts of Gaul adopted the concept of coin-making, which had previously been unused in the Celtic world. Though bearing striking Greek and later Roman influence, coins made by the Celts demonstrate many of the same artistic qualities that are shown on other finds from Celtic archaeological sites.

These coins are also an indication that, even before the conquests of Rome, Celtic culture was one that was more than ready to adopt new ideas from its surroundings.

Section Nine

Celtic Archaeological Sites and Finds

Owing to the sheer number of archaeological sites associated with the ancient Celts across most of Europe, a comprehensive overview of all archaeological research dealing with the Celts would be a herculean undertaking. For our more general purposes here, we will discuss major individual finds and sites that have made the largest contributions to the modern understanding of the Celtic peoples. These archaeological finds are not all from the same cultural context, as there is geographic and chronological separation between many of the sites and artifacts listed here.

La Tene, Switzerland- The archaeological type site for what has come to be called La Tene culture, the La Tene site in what is today western

Switzerland is one of the most important finds with regards to the research of Celtic material culture. This site contains many burials of elite members of an early La Tene society, giving archaeologists a close look at the societal stratification that occurred among Celtic groups in these times.

The most notable objects that have been recovered from the La Tene site are the various metal artifacts associated with warfare. Swords, shields and even chariots have been found buried alongside the dead of this remote Celtic culture. Many researchers have suggested that this indicates a special significance given to warriors in Celtic society, an interpretation that is backed up by similar burial findings at other sites. Most intriguing, perhaps, is the fact that many of the artifacts that were buried alongside the deceased at La Tene do not appear to have actually been used in battle, suggesting that they were made specifically to be ceremonially buried with elite members of the warrior class.

The site also features the remains of several houses once used by the Celts who inhabited La Tene. These homes, though probably not dissimilar in construction methods, are not of the more typically British roundhouse variety that was discussed in the section on Celtic life, but were laid out on

a more squared ground plan. Another prominent feature of the site are the remains of a bridge that once spanned a river along which the site was located. This bridge reveals a high degree of engineering knowledge and capability on the part of the ancient Celts who built it, running as it does for more than 300 feet supported by wooden supports that would have been sunk into the mud at the river's bottom.

There is some dispute as to the exact dating of the site at La Tene. Many researchers have concluded that the site is probably representative of the early 3rd century BCE, while others have suggested a date in the 4th century BCE, a time at which other La Tene Culture sites show similar characteristics. The height of the site's activity as a settlement is generally agreed upon as the late 3rd or early 2nd century BCE, with an abandonment time in the mid 1st century BCE accepted among most of the scholarly community.

Gundestrup Cauldron- Among the most controversial archaeological finds that has been at times associated with Celtic culture is the Gundestrup Cauldron, a magnificent vessel made from richly decorated plates of silver that were assembled into a single cauldron. The Gundestrup Cauldron is the largest single silver object known from the La

Tene era, and is generally believed to have been a product of the mid 2nd century BCE.

The cauldron's origins have been a matter of much dispute over the course of the last century. In 1895, the cauldron was found in a bog in Denmark, a region which is not associated with any known Celtic habitation. The silver working of the artifact is also not typical of Celtic metallurgy, which has lent weight to the argument that the Gundestrup Cauldron is not of Celtic origin. However, there are also pieces of evidence that would seem to suggest substantial Celtic influence. Most of the images that are shown on the cauldron seem to be derived from Celtic mythology, and the style of the artwork itself is reminiscent of Celtic styles of the time. The physical composition of the cauldron also suggests that it was made by a group that was engaged in the Celtic trade networks, as both the silver and the tin that was used to hold the plates together have been found to match deposits from regions of Europe that were normally associated with Celtic habitation. The metalwork itself has often been attributed to the Thracian style of smithing. The Thracians, though not Celts, were also not associated with any of the tribes of Denmark, being as they were situated in the Balkans.

Several theories have arisen regarding the origin of the Gundestrup Cauldron and its seemingly convoluted physical and stylistic makeup. One theory that has gained a reasonable degree of traction is that the cauldron was produced by Thracian smiths at the request of a Celtic tribe in Gaul. This theory has the advantage of explaining the Celtic artistic influence, the sources of the materials and the Thracian style of metalwork that the cauldron displays. Others have suggested that the cauldron may simply reflect the melding together of cultures that occurred as the Romans began a systematic unification of Europe during the same time period. Precisely what the facts of the matter are will probably never be known.

Tintignac, France- Many of the most important finds of Celtic archaeology were found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when a wave of archaeological interest in Europe was at its height. However, it is important to remember that new finds still come to light each and every year and add to our current knowledge about the Celtic peoples. Among more recent finds are new artifacts at the previously known archaeological site of Tintignac in central France.

Though Tintignac was originally discovered in the early 19th century, research has been sporadic, and until recently it was widely considered to

have been merely another fairly typical Celtic settlement. In 2004, however, a trove of fine artifacts uncovered at the site redefined its importance. These artifacts, aside from the fairly typical swords and other instruments of war that are common in important Celtic finds, included several musical instruments and figurines that were previously not thought to have been present among the Celts of Gaul. The Tintignac site is a fascinating reminder of the fact that even sites that have been studied for decades can yield unexpected new material.

The Battersea Shield- The Battersea shield is probably the most famous piece of Celtic armor that has been uncovered by archaeologists, though it was almost certainly meant for ceremonial usage rather than for functional use in real battles. The shield was found among a cache of artifacts by a remarkable stroke of luck when, in 1857, laborers working on a bridge spanning the Thames in London dredged it from the river. The geography of the area makes it a natural choice for a river fording, and a group of Roman artifacts nearby suggested to some researchers that this point may even have been where Caesar's army had made a crossing of the river during his invasion of Britain. Though the entire find was archaeologically valuable beyond measure, the finely decorated bronze shield would become the most well-known artifact from the site.

Illustration 13: The Battersea Shield

The Battersea Shield is a roughly two and a half foot long bronze shield decorated with raised reliefs in the traditional curved geometric pattern of British Celtic artwork. Enamel accents also feature prominently on the surface of the shield. Though the Celts are known to have decorated everyday objects, the Battersea Shield's incredibly opulent artistic elements combined with its less than practical design have led researchers to conclude that it was probably made for a king or other elite member of society as a purely decorative symbol of status. Another theory has posited that the shield may have been made as a sacrifice meant to be thrown into

the river as a symbolic offering in a religious ceremony. Though an unusual use of resources, this practice has many parallels in the ancient world, and both Celtic societies and many of their prehistoric predecessors in Europe are known to have followed this practice of casting valuable offerings into bodies of water.

Msecke Zehrovice Head- Celtic art is unusual in the world of artistic history due to the rarity with which humans were portrayed in it. However, this rule of exclusion is not hard and fast. Several instances of Celtic representations of humans have been found, and none is more famous than the Czech Msecke Zehrovice Head.

The head, which was discovered in 1943, is carved from a single piece of limestone. The figure is a man with a notably pointed chin, a curled mustache that is not accompanied by a beard, eyes which are unusually close together, long, curving eyebrows and hair which is neatly combed to the back of the head. Whether or not there is a special significance to this method of portraying the subject (a cultural ideal of appearance, for example) is not currently known. It is also unknown whose face the head is meant to represent and why it was created. Most scholars believe that the

head probably depicts a Celtic king or noble, but even this rather nonspecific concept is only a reasonable hypothesis.

Though exact dating is difficult because of the fact that it is made of stone, the head is generally believed to date from sometime in the 2nd century BCE, based on other artifacts that were found alongside it which are assumed to be contemporary. It may be that the period of its creation explains the unusual nature of the Msecke Zehrovice Head. During this period, in which Roman and Greek influence were beginning to have a substantial impact on Celtic culture, we see that Celtic gods gradually became portrayed in human form more commonly. It is possible that the same artistic phenomenon lead to the creation of a portrayal of a specific human head.

The Agris Helmet- Much like the Battersea Shield, the Agris Helmet is a highly decorative piece of armor that was almost certainly never intended for functional use. The helmet was found in a cave in France that is believed to have been used as shelter for Celtic tribes from either Roman invaders or from other tribes of attacking Celts based on a wall that was once built to defend its entrance. Like the Battersea Shield, the

Helmet may have been deposited in the place where it was eventually found as a type of religious offering.

The Agris Helmet is conical in form and was created using some of the highest-quality of gold leaf known from anywhere in the ancient world, with samples taken from it having been tested at purity levels in excess of 99%. The decoration, though certainly Celtic in nature, shows elements that are more typical of Greco-Roman art, suggesting that the creators of the piece may have had some knowledge of and contact with the Greek artistic traditions, something that would not be surprising given the contact between Greek and Celtic cultures in the Iron Age. The gold leaf itself was applied to the bronze structure of the helmet below.

As a piece of Celtic artwork, the Agris Helmet stands out as one of the most remarkable finds ever made in Europe. Its fantastically intricate design, the quality of the workmanship and the purity of the gold leaf that was used to finish it all demonstrate a very high level of technical skill that went into its creation. It is artifacts such as the Agris Helmet that serve as a definitive reminder that the Celts were nowhere near the barbarians that Roman writers and historians portrayed them as.

Lavau Tomb- Another find from recent years is that of a complete Celtic tomb near Lavau, France. The find, announced in 2015, is among the best-preserved burials ever found from Europe's Celtic period. Owing to the richness of the grave goods, the Celtic royal tomb in Lavau is an invaluable glimpse at Celtic material culture in the 5th century BCE, which is generally accepted as the tomb's date of origin.

Among the grave goods are artifacts of both Greek and Etruscan origin, showing that even in this early period Celtic trade networks connected the tribal regions of Europe with the dominating civilizations of Greece and Italy at the time. Ceramics, gold and silver jewelry, an ornate cauldron and even a chariot make up parts of this find. Unique about the tomb, however, is that archaeologists believe it may have been for a princess or queen, even though the funeral objects that were found alongside the body are much more typical of a male burial. The body itself, though surrounded by objects associated with masculinity in Celtic culture, appears feminine in nature, possibly indicating that the Lavau tomb is in fact the burial place of a woman. If this is the case, the find has significant implications with regards to establishing the roles of women in Celtic society with archaeological evidence.

Warrior of Hirschlanden- Another of the few examples of depiction of the human form by Celtic artists is the Warrior of Hirschlanden, which is a product of late Hallstat Culture. Unlike the Czech Msecke Zehrovice head bust discussed earlier in this section, the Warrior of Hirschlanden is a life-sized statue portraying the entire body of a Celtic man, one of very few of its kind ever found.

Illustration 14: The Warrior of Hirschlanden

The statue depicts a nude man whose only pieces of clothing appear to be a pointed hat and a belt. Carved into the belt is a depiction of a dagger, which has lent the statue its title as a warrior. The artifact was found in 1963 during a burial mound excavation in the portion of Germany usually associated with Celtic Hallstat Culture. It is generally believed that the

statue once stood either directly in front of or on top of the mound and was probably a depiction of the mound's occupant.

The British Camp- Though the Celts in Britain were prolific builders of hill forts, the site that has come to be known as the British Camp is among the most prominent Iron Age construction in all of Britain. The camp is a well-situated defensive position surrounded by multiple protective layers of earthworks. Although much of the archaeological integrity of the site has been disturbed by more recent activity (not the least of which being the construction of a major castle on the hill during the years immediately preceding the Norman invasion), the site still stands out as one of the most remarkable examples of pre-Roman British engineering.

Illustration 15: The Celtic hill fort known as the British Camp.

The site dates from later in the Iron Age, probably having been constructed in the early 2nd century BCE. The hill fort is one of the most extensively defended positions that was ever built by the Celts of Britain. The British Camp has also been suggested as the site where Caractacus fought his final battle against the armies of Claudius during the Roman invasion that finally incorporated Britain into the empire. However, contemporary accounts of the battle would seem to indicate a position that is closer to the Severn River. Regardless of the probable error in identifying the camp as the place where the armies of Caractacus were defeated, the Brish Camp remains an important site for the study of pre-Roman Celtic fortifications in the British Isles.

Zidovar, Serbia- After the expansion of the Gauls into eastern Europe, a long period of Celtic occupation ensued. In recent years, few sites have served better as a source of information about the arc of Celtic history in these areas than a hill fort at Zidovar, in modern-day Serbia. The fort is believed to have been most active between the 3rd and 1st centuries BCE, and has yielded some of the most remarkable silver jewelry and pieces of art ever discovered in a Celtic site. The hill fort is also one of the best-preserved Celtic sites in the eastern sections of Europe, where many are apt to forget that there was a substantial Celtic presence.

Numantia- As one of the largest *oppida* in Iberia, Numantia played a key role in the resistance of the Celtiberian tribes to the invasion of the Romans. As an archaeological site, the city has become critical to the modern understanding of how the Celtic and Iberian cultural traditions came together to form the Celtiberian culture. Artifacts found in the city have shown varying degrees of Iberian influence on Celtic artistic traditions, while the layout of the city itself tells modern researchers much about the city planning and social organization that would probably have been typical in a Celtiberian urban setting.

Section Ten

The Celtic Legacy: Popular Perceptions of the Celts and the Effect of the Celts on Modern Europe

There is little doubt that the Celtic peoples of Europe are among the least understood of the peoples of the ancient world. Despite extensive archaeological research, thorough studies of what records remain of their activities in Europe and the work of thousands of scholars across the past several centuries, it is a regrettable fact that there are still many questions about the Celts and their ways of life. This enigmatic legacy has made room for extensive misinterpretation of the Celtic peoples.

Historic scholars often began their researches into the Celts with the understanding that the tribes of Europe were barbaric and uncivilized. This assumption comes as little surprise, given the Roman records that were and still are the primary written source material for the study of the Celts. As archaeological evidence began to come to light, however, a different picture slowly began to emerge of the Celts as a much more advanced group of peoples than the Romans had made them out to be. The popular

image of the Celts as barbarians, however, had more or less become fixed in the popular mind, and remains so to this day.

The study of Celtic linguistics, however, began very early on and promoted several theories that would eventually come to shape the field of linguistics as a whole. Working with surviving Celtic languages as a basis for analysis of common linguistic elements, the famous linguist William Jones included the Celtic language group is his original theory that several languages throughout Europe and certain parts of Asia shared a common ancestor language. Jones' classifications would later be developed into what is today called the Indo-European language family. Later linguistic research would delve more deeply into the Celtic languages specifically, as Jones had only analyzed them insofar as establishing their common ancestral elements with other Indo-European languages.

Beyond simply the societal perceptions of the Celts, a certain view of Celtic religion emerged, probably driven largely by the description that Pliny the Elder gives of a Druidic mistletoe harvesting ritual. The Celtic religion, and to an even larger degree the Druids, became seen as a bastion of ritualistic practices and mystical wisdom. This perception culminated with supposed Druidic customs being co-opted into the occult and Neo-

Pagan movements of the 19th and 20th centuries. These supposed rites and customs eventually developed into Neo-Druidism, a semi-religious system of belief that has many adherent, particularly in the British Isles. However, there is no historical backing to the practices of modern “Druids,” as no records of specific Druidic practices have survived except for Pliny's account of the mistletoe harvest.

The Celts were also strangely swept up into the Romantic literary and artistic culture as idealizing a type of inherent inner nobility that was untouched by modern civilization. Though certainly not as derogatory as the Roman misinterpretations of the Celtic peoples and their societies, such descriptions were easily as lacking in historical accuracy as those produced by the Roman Empire. This phenomenon coincided with a glorification of Celtic heritage in many places, particularly France, which was reestablishing its nationalistic identity in the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic eras. Many famous Celtic figures, such as Vercingetorix and Boudicca, became national heroes of the countries that incorporated the lands they once ruled. However, even with such promotion of the Celts, they were still largely seen as primitives, albeit from a very different perspective.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a limited shift in perceptions of the Celts has occurred. The weight of archaeological evidence suggesting that the Celtic tribes were significantly more advanced than the Romans made them out to be has grown to be so great that very few people who are especially familiar with Celtic history still endorse the Roman interpretation of Celtic societies. Even in the popular mind, perceptions of the Celts have gradually taken on a more balanced view. As has happened many times in the history of research into the peoples of the ancient world, mystery surrounding the Celts bred much in terms of false information and poor interpretation. As we learn more and more about the Celts and their real place in European history, this misinformation gradually gives way to a more objective historical view.

The Celtic peoples, their divisions and their migrations also played a key role in shaping Europe as we know it today. Many of the political regions that today are the countries of Europe have their roots in ancient Celtic tribal divisions. Though these roots are distant and nearly two millennia of history and population movement stands between the Celts and modern Europe, there can be little doubt that the Celtic tribes played an important role in laying the early foundations for the map of the European continent that exists in the modern world.

Nowhere is the influence of the Celtic peoples and their culture more profoundly felt than in Britain and Ireland, where populations mostly descended from the same Celtic tribes that resisted the Romans remain to this day. Certainly, new populations have moved into Britain in the centuries since the fall of the Roman Empire. Most notable among these are the Angles and the Saxons, two Germanic tribes that migrated into Britain during the early Middle Ages, as well as the later invading Norman population. The lines of demarcation between these populations and the predominantly Celtic peoples inhabiting Ireland, Wales and Scotland, however, have allowed a uniquely Celtic culture to survive in these places.

Ireland, in particular, has come to be thought of as a place heavily influenced by its ancient Celtic culture. Its folklore, literary tradition, cultural customs and even native language are all descended from those of the Gaels, the Celtic peoples who dominated Ireland during and before the coming of the Romans to the British Isles. Wales, too, is frequently associated with Celtic traditions, retaining as it did a largely native culture until its eventual conquest by the English kings. Native Welsh is also descended by the Celtic languages of ancient Britain, and many place and

personal names in Wales today can trace their roots back to Celtic linguistic origins.

Scotland, however, is often ignored as a haven of what remains of the ancient Celtic cultural traditions. Despite this, Scotland is the heir to not one, but two, Celtic cultural traditions. The first is that of its native Celtic inhabitants, the Picts, who remained the greatest power in the northern regions of Britain until nearly the end of the 1st millennium CE. The Picts, though often thought of as among the most barbarous and least civilized of the Celtic tribes, were in reality a highly advanced group of tribes with an incredibly rich artistic tradition not quite like any other in ancient Europe. The Picts, however, would reach their height much later on in history, truly coming into their own as an advanced culture in the 4th to 8th centuries CE. The Pictish tribes are a remarkable historical sample, as their relative isolation in the Scottish highlands allowed for a relatively pure Celtic culture to survive long after others had adopted the cultural influences of Rome. Over time, the culture and traditions of the Gaels, who had long had an indigenous presence in southern Scotland, spread and overtook Pictish culture, leaving Scotland as a fascinating example of a mixed Celtic tradition that pervades its national identity and history even in historic and modern times.

Though Celtic culture in most of Europe was long ago ended by centuries of Roman domination followed by the migration of Germanic tribes across much of the continent, the influence of the ancient Celtic peoples on the Europe we know today is much more extensive than many realize. In establishing complex systems of trade that spanned the continent, creating rich artistic and cultural traditions that have survived in some societies and influenced many others and leaving a mass of archaeological sites across every portion of the European continent, the Celts not only have influenced modern European peoples and nations, but also left us with opportunities to look back at Europe's ancient past.

Appendixes

Appendix A

Major Celtic Tribes

As we have discussed, the history of the Celts is not truly the history of a single people, but rather the sum of the individual histories of the tribes that displayed a Celtic culture. Many of these Celtic tribes have very likely been lost entirely to history, while many others have survived recorded only in name. Several, however, have a concrete history attached to them which can be traced to some extent. Following is a list of some of these more major and well-understood tribes of the Celtic peoples.

Brigantes- The most powerful tribe of what is today northern England, the Brigantes held a regional hegemony over many of the other tribes in their area. Like many Celtic tribes in Britain, there is little information regarding their history prior to the Roman contact with them. Archaeological finds in areas believed to have been almost exclusively populated by the Brigantes, however, have demonstrated that the tribe occupied a fairly stable territory for several hundred years prior to Caesar's invasion. It is very likely that the Brigantes engaged in the frequent tribal warfare that is believed to have permeated pre-Roman Britain. During the Roman period, the Brigantes would alternately support and oppose Roman rule, depending on what was politically convenient at the time. Some theories have held that the Brigantes staged an uprising

during the Roman period and may even have attempted to form alliances with the tribes of Scotland to drive the Romans back to the south. While this theory offers explanations to several of the decisions made by the Romans with regards to the governance of northern England, there is no concrete evidence to support it.

Aedui- One of the most influential tribes in the Celtic portion of Italy, the Aedui are known to have formed an alliance of political and military convenience with the Romans long before Caesar's conquests in Gaul. As one of the tribes that took part in the invasion of Greece that eventually led to the second Battle of Thermopylae and the Celtic migration into Gallatia, the Aedui have one of the longest recorded histories of any of the Celtic tribes of Europe. In the era during and after Caesar's Gallic campaigns, the Aedui had a complex relationship with Rome. Their long-standing peaceful relations balanced against a perceived threat from the growing Roman Empire split the tribe on the issue of supporting Roman rule. At the Battle of Bibracte (which was at the time the Aedui capital), Caesar was largely supported by the tribe, but was delayed by an individual leader who postponed the delivery of supplies to the Roman army. During the revolt of Vercingetorix, the Aedui joined the other tribes of Gaul in the rebellion, but returned to more or less peaceful Roman rule

once the revolution had been put down. The reigns of the Roman emperors Augustus and Tiberius saw further strife with the Aedui, including limited military rebellions. However, the tribe was finally quelled once and for all by the emperor Claudius, who increased the status of the tribe to allow them to send representatives to the Roman Senate. After this event, the Aedui seem to have Romanized to an extreme degree, largely taking on the cultural and political characteristics of Rome.

Iceni- Prominent in the eastern region of modern England, the Iceni are by far best known for having produced the revolutionary queen Boudica after the conquest of southern Britain by the Romans during the time of Claudius. Intriguingly, the Iceni at first were one of the more cooperative tribes, freely submitting to Roman rule rather than engaging them in the field as so many other Celtic tribes in Britain did. This led to a period in which the Iceni enjoyed a degree of autonomy with the political framework of Roman Britain. With the hostile takeover that preceded Boudica's uprising, however, the Iceni became an almost permanent enemy of the Roman Empire. After the defeat of Boudica, the history of the Iceni becomes unclear. Presumably, like most Celtic tribes in England, the Iceni endured a long period of Roman rule, adopted certain elements of

Roman culture, and were later largely displaced by the invading Angles and Saxons of Germanic descent.

Caledonians- Most of the Pictish tribes are known in name only. The Caledonians, however, have a more distinguished history as one of the primary Scottish enemies of the Romans. Throughout the years of the Roman occupation of Britain, the Caledonians would fight off the advances of the Romans into northern territories many times. In at least one instance, an obscure military campaign launched into the lands beyond Hadrian's Wall in 209 CE, the Caledonians are known to have lost some of the territory that they claimed for themselves to the Romans, though the Roman army would not hold it for long. The Caledonians would ultimately resist the push northward, keeping the Romans at bay until the eventual fall of the empire. Though not specifically recorded, it is generally believed that border skirmishes between the Romans and the Caledonians on the northern frontier of Roman Britain were likely a common occurrence.

Cantabri- Lending their name to the series of wars throughout the area in which they lived, the Cantabri were the dominating Celtic group in the northern Iberian Peninsula. Properly speaking, the Cantabri were a close

confederation of tribes, but they seem to have more or less functioned as a single political entity in most instances. The Cantabri were portrayed by the Romans as barbaric (even among the Celtic tribes), but masters of war, a cultural trait which earned them some respect in the Roman world. Thanks to this militaristic reputation, the Cantabri would find themselves frequently hired as mercenaries to assist various Roman forces after Iberia had been fully subdued. This arrangement would ultimately result in a semi-autonomous status being granted to the Cantabri, who would go on to survive as one of the last truly Celtic groups in continental Europe well into the Middle Ages.

Iverni- One of the major tribes of Ireland, the Iverni occupied a territory in the southwestern part of the island. Like most of the Irish tribes, the Iverni are by far better known from later periods, after the adoption of Christianity and its accompanying Roman customs, than from the period in which they practiced a truly Celtic way of life. The Iverni are first identified in Ptolemy's Geography. The history of this tribe prior to its mention in this 2nd century work is unclear, though it is generally believed that a group speaking the Ivernic Celtic language was native to modern Munster and the surrounding areas.

Anartes- Tribes in the eastern parts of Europe remain enigmatic, even among the Celts, with many being known by name only. The Anartes, however, are known to have been one of the more major tribes of this region, probably occupying the area that today constitutes Romania and parts of Slovakia. The Anartes hold a special place in the Celtic history of this region for having been one of the only tribes ever uprooted completely by the Romans and moved to one of the provinces bordering on the Danube as a punishment for failing to lend military support to the famous philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius. Culturally, however, the Anartes had moved away from a purely Celtic basis long before this had occurred. At some point following their migration into the area that would become their homeland, they encountered a people known as the Dacians, who were already settled there. The Dacians are thought to have been related to the Thracians, and so were a non-Celtic people. Over time, the Celtic Anartes gradually adopted the non-Celtic Dacian culture.

Catuvellauni- As the tribe that was once ruled by Caractacus, the noted resistor of Roman expansion into Britain under Claudius, the Catuvellauni played an important role in the history of Britain both before and after the Roman conquest. It is believed that the Catuvellauni and other southern Celtic tribes in Britain may have been descended from the Belgic tribes,

who Caesar suggests may have launched a limited incursion into Britain at some point long before the Roman invasion, though this claim is a matter of some debate. After a long resistance, the Catuvellauni eventually fell to Roman rule, but remained a major regional power, along with the Iceni, who occupied a territory near to them. It is believed that, over time, political convenience and more moderate Roman rule under later emperors turned the Catuvellauni into somewhat more cooperative subjects, as it is known that they eventually became eligible for Roman citizenship and helped the Roman governors of Britain in maintaining the defenses at Hadrian's Wall.

Arverni- Aside from simply having been the tribe that produced the rebel Vercingetorix, the Arverni were one of the most powerful tribes in all of Gaul, and held a general hegemony over much of the region in the period before Caesar's conquests. The tribe was instrumental in the early Roman wars against the Celts in Gaul during the late second century BCE, after which its power and influence went into a steep decline, surpassed by other tribes in Gaul that were still growing into regional powers. The Arverni are considered to have been one of the most materially prosperous tribes of Gaul, owing to their situation in the rich lands of what is today central and southern France. Technologically, the Arverni are also known

to have been among the more developed tribes of Gaul, having been able to create superior weapons and other metallic objects to many of their neighbors. The Arverni, after the defeat of Vercingetorix, would remain an important economic power, acting as one of the largest payers of tributes to the Roman Empire among the tribes of Gaul.

Appendix B

Known Ancient Celtic Languages and Scripts

One of the major defining characteristics of the Celtic peoples was the use of a group of languages that shared a common origin. In some instances, these languages even developed their own written scripts (though many of these developed after the fall of truly pure Celtic culture to Roman influence). So far in this work, we have paid little attention to written Celtic records because they are uncommon and not particularly useful in discerning specific historic events during the era in which the Celts retained their own unique culture without Roman influence. However, in order for this work to be as comprehensive as possible, an

exploration of both several known Celtic languages and scripts will follow below.

Proto-Celtic- Proto-Celtic is a theoretical language used to explain the common root of all of the other Celtic languages. Proto-Celtic has been a fascinating example of the use of historical linguistics to reconstruct a language that has not survived in any written or spoken form. Though this reconstruction, like any other of a language that is entirely lost in its original form, is certainly full of errors and gaps, the basic vocabulary of the Proto-Celtic language can be largely inferred from commonalities in the living Celtic languages. Proto-Celtic was probably spoken in the area of southern Germany that produced the Hallstat Culture. However, earlier roots going back even into the Beaker Culture period (and in some cases long before) have been suggested for its origins. Because of the scarcity of linguistic data, any dating scheme for the earliest use of Proto-Celtic remains purely theoretical.

Lepontic- Lepontic is the earliest Celtic language that has been attested in writing. Spoken in the northern regions of Italy during the Iron Age, the first written examples of Lepontic originate from the early 6th century BCE. The writing of this language suggests early contact between the

Celtic tribes in Italy and the Etruscan civilization, as it is written in a script that is believed to be based on the Etruscan alphabet. The Lepontic language may represent one of the oldest of the Celtic languages, based as it was in an area quite near to where the Celtic culture originated. The writing system used for Lepontic also seems to have been transferred northward, probably along existing trade routes, as it is strongly related to the runic alphabet that was used by the Germanic tribes.

Pictish- Known to have been spoken in Scotland until the Gaelic takeover toward the end of the 1st millennium CE, Pictish was probably the descendant of an earlier Celtic language spoken in Scotland from a very early time long before the Roman invasions. However, linguistic evidence for the British Celtic languages in this period is virtually nonexistent. Pictish is generally considered to be a Brittonic language, one of the two major language families of the Celts in the British Isles (the other being Goidelic languages, primarily spoken in Ireland). Because only a handful of individual and place names have survived from Pictish, reconstruction of the language has been a very difficult task for modern linguist.

Primitive Irish- Primitive Irish is the earliest of the known Goidelic languages and the ancestor of the modern Irish language, as well as the

Goidelic-based language that later supplanted Pictish in Scotland. Like Pictish, Primitive Irish is probably descended from an earlier language that was used in Celtic Ireland before and during the Roman period of Britain. Its earliest attested records date from the 4th century CE. Primitive Irish, along with its immediate successor Old Irish, was written in a script known as Ogham, which also is first presented in the 4th century CE.

Common Brittonic- The source language of several other Celtic languages, including Welsh and Cornish, Common Brittonic is probably a form or a descendant of the language spoken by most of the Celts of southern Britain at the time that the Romans arrived. However, as it is first attested during the early Middle Ages, it is impossible to say with any certainty how closely related the form of Common Brittonic that we are aware of today is to the more ancient language of the Celts in this area. This is a common problem with the Celtic languages of Britain, as so little of their earlier forms has been preserved for modern study.

Celtiberian- This language is a mixture of a Celtic root with several inclusions from the non-Celtic Iberian language that is believed to predate the arrival of Celtic culture and language in the Iberian Peninsula. Celtiberian first appears in the 3rd century BCE, and several different

forms of it with varying degrees of Celtic influence appear throughout its history. Aside from several loanwords and grammatical elements, Iberian Celts also adopted the pre-existing writing system of the Iberians, which was slightly modified to write the Celtiberian language.

Gallic- Sometimes also referred to as Gaulish, the Gallic language is one of the primary languages spoken throughout continental Europe, in the region that was traditionally known to the Romans as Gaul. Early references to the language in Greek texts confirm that it was in existence long before the Romans began their invasions of Gaul. However, as neither the Greeks nor the Romans frequently delved deeply into linguistic studies, it is quite possible that what is described as “Gallic” in ancient texts may actually have been a cluster of very closely related languages or dialects of a single language spoken in the different parts of Gaul that shared extensive commonalities in their vocabulary and grammar. The Gallic language is also the source of some of the largest surviving texts written in any Celtic language from a time close to the height of Celtic culture. The most notable example of such a text is known as the Larzac Tablet. The tablet is a curse tablet, meant to invoke supernatural powers to cause harm or misfortune to an individual or group of people. In the specific case of the Larzac Tablet, the curse is directed against a group of

women who are described in the text as being associated with an otherwise unknown woman named Severa Tertionicna. Who this woman was and why she was being cursed are unknown, but the tablet remains as the single longest and most complete written source of the Gallic language available for modern scholars to study.

Galatian- Galatian language arose out of the migration of Gallic Celts into modern Turkey following the failed invasion of Greece early in Celtic history. The language was a mixture of a dominating Gallic influence with elements borrowed from the languages that the Celts encountered in the eastern regions after migrating there. Vague references to the language continue to be found as late as the 6th century CE, but it is very likely that by this time it had evolved far away from its purely Celtic base and had incorporated more of the Greek and Semitic linguistic elements that would have been more prevalent in that part of the world at the time.

Noric- By far the least well-understood of the Celtic languages for which we have any contemporary written evidence is the Noric language, which seems to have existed in eastern Europe for an undefined period of time probably before and during the era of Roman supremacy in Europe. Only two written inscriptions attest the existence of this language, and

even these are extremely brief and incomplete. Owing to this extremely limited information, it is impossible to say when the Noric language originated, when it finally died out or how large the area in which it was widely spoken was.

Unknown and Entirely Extinct Celtic Languages- No exploration of the Celtic languages can truly be complete without the acknowledgment that our current understanding of the Celtic languages is very far from complete. Though historical linguists have been able to learn much about the probable structures of ancient Celtic languages from their surviving modern counterparts, it is almost certain that there are perhaps dozens of Celtic languages of which no record survives. The immense diversity of cultures and traditions across different regions of Europe during the Iron Age makes it all but certain that the Celtic language group was much broader than the languages we may be sure existed.

Appendix C

Short Bibliography of Recommended Further Reading

It is the sincere hope of the author that this short general history of the Celtic peoples will inspire some readers to make a more thorough study of this remarkable group of tribes that defined the history of Europe in the Iron Age. For readers who wish to delve deeper into a study of the Celts, their history and their way of life, a wealth of information is available. The following works are highly recommended as an excellent starting point for more in-depth research.

Caesar, Julius. Commentarii de Bello Gallico (Commentaries on the Gallic War).

Cunliffe, Barry. (1997). The Ancient Celts. Oxford, England. Oxford University Press.

James, Simon. (2005). The World of the Celts. London, England. Thames & Hudson.

Koch, John. (2005). Celtic Culture. Santa Barbara, California. ABC-CLIO.

Ellis, Peter B. (2003). The Celts. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Running Press.

Ptolemy, Claudius. Geographia (Geography).

Dio, Cassius. Historia Romana (Roman History)

Conclusion and a Brief Word From the Author

Although many aspects of the Celtic tribes and the individuals that made them up remains enigmatic, there can be little question that their history and activities greatly shaped the character of Europe in both ancient and modern times. Though portrayed as barbarians and primitives by the Romans who eventually came to rule over them, a more objective view of historical and archaeological evidence shows us that the Celtic peoples were, in reality, a group of advanced peoples with a complex culture all their own. Beginning with their spread across Europe during the early times of Hallstat Culture, the Celts became not only the most culturally important group in pre-Roman Europe, but also an important influence on the areas that they controlled, leaving a legacy that has helped to shape Europe for the past 2,500 years.

As this work has noted many times, it is very likely that the mysteries of the Celts will never be entirely solved. The extremely minimalistic nature of the information we have about the Celtic tribes in the era prior to their conflicts with the Romans makes it difficult to draw conclusions beyond what may be inferred from archaeological findings. This fact, however, does not make the Celtic tribes of ancient Europe any the less remarkable or intriguing. Though there are many questions that will probably never be answered, it is a testament to the culture of these ancient European tribes that so many thousands of historians, archaeologists, linguists and other scholars have dedicated their lives and careers to the study of the Celts over the past centuries.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank you for downloading and reading *The Celts: The Enigmatic Peoples of Iron Age Europe*. It is my hope that you found it both enlightening and enjoyable, and that it will encourage you to pursue further researches into this most remarkable period of European history. Though it is my sincere hope that this book will act as a basic framework upon which to build future learning in this area of historical studies, there is still more to be learned about the Celtic tribes for those who are interested.

If you enjoyed this work, you may also enjoy some of my other short histories of the ancient world. Links provided below will direct you to the Amazon pages where they may be found if you would like to explore other great cultures and periods of history.

The Hittites: The Lost Empire of the Ancient World

The Sumerians: History's First Recorded Civilization

Sparta: The Warrior State of Ancient Greece

The Pyramids: Ancient Egypt's Most Iconic Monuments

The Achaemenid Empire: The First Great Persian Empire

In addition to these works, it is also my intention to offer readers several more short histories of the periods and civilizations of the ancient world in the future. If you would like to be informed when my future works are released, you can follow the link below to my author page on Amazon and click the yellow “Follow” button there. When my future histories are released, Amazon will send you notifications via email.

My Author Page

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who have read my various histories, whether this history of the Celts was your first introduction to my work or whether you have also taken the time to read my other short historical works. Since beginning this series of short history books, I have been privileged to receive an immense amount of support and positive feedback from readers, which has consistently encouraged me to continue to produce more and even better work for those that I know have chosen my writings to learn about the history of the ancient world. As such, I would like to invite all readers to leave an honest review of your thoughts about this book on the page from which you downloaded it. Your feedback is important to me as an author, as it allows me to find out what my readers enjoy and to continue to make my short, economical historical introductions to various eras of human history even better in the future. For those of you who choose to leave feedback in the form of a review, I would like to extend my thanks in advance.

Again, my sincerest thanks and gratitude for having chosen and read this short work,

Duncan Ryan.

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